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cover illustration
Dream person scene in *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994)

Correction: In *Screen*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2006), we referred to Michael Renov's book *The Subject of Documentary* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004) as *The Subject in Documentary*. We apologise for this error.

The great secret: silence, cinema and modernism

DES O'RAWE

Silence is not simply the absence of sound any more than black is only the absence of colour. Silence traverses all manner of contexts: it is never absolute and achieves significance in relation to what it denies, displaces, or disavows. It is impossible to think, speak or write about silence without invoking sound:

> 'silence' never ceases to imply its opposite and to depend on its presence: just as there is no 'up' without 'down' or 'left' without 'right', so one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence.[1]

John Cage's *4′33″* is – despite itself – an experiment with sound; the 'silent' screen-paintings of Robert Rauschenberg contradict abstraction by representing it; the silences that propagate in the works of Samuel Beckett intimate the ineffability of everything because they are involved in a search for something. In film, it has been commonplace to view the phenomenon of silence from a nostalgic perspective: 'What was given up in giving up the silence of film, in particular the silence of the voice?'.[2] However, the persistence of silence in cinema raises important questions about representation and abstraction, the expressive and the secretive. How does the experience of silence influence our perception of moving images, and their relationship to a soundtrack? Does silence emphasize sound or is sound the source of silence? Does filmic silence create an aural void that produces an experience of visual plenitude? This essay proposes to examine some histories, theories and moments of filmic silence in the hope of contributing towards a critical practice capable of

1 Susan Sontag, 'The aesthetics of silence', in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1966), p. 11.

2 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 147.

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acknowledging the enduring significance of its many forms and structures.

It is generally accepted that the relative ease with which the American film industry successfully adopted sound technologies was due as much to the immediate needs of its narrative aesthetic as to the miracle of Hollywood ingenuity or the bravery of corporate investors. Synchronous sound rapidly enhanced the acoustic realism of a cinematic experience that – by the early 1920s – had made the story (and the script) central to the production and reception of commercially viable films. This said, the complete integration of sound into this narrative-orientated cinema was not without its footfalls: the inconvenient crackling of arc lights; the restriction of screen movement; the need for longer takes; and the 'foreign problem'. With speech came language, and the language of the American cinema was, of course, English. Without some fluency in English, countless foreign actors were either dubbed (for a while) or dropped (for good). Meanwhile, non-Anglophone countries did what they could to protect themselves against the latest phase of US cultural imperialism: linguistic assimilation. Without resources comparable to those available to Hollywood, effective resistance was virtually impossible. Even in France, the coming of sound traumatized the film industry between 1928 and 1934, crippling independent production and facilitating the exploitative ambitions of foreign companies such as Tobis and Paramount. Moreover, the quantum conversion to synchronous sound in US cinema did not bode well for more experimental and artistically committed filmmakers:

> The result was a general stratification, at least of the U.S. film world, with the foreign and the avant garde banished together to the commercial periphery and fewer opportunities for the general audience to see movies that did not conform to the classical Hollywood model.[3]

It is hardly surprising, then, that the most eloquent and impassioned opponents of sound were filmmakers and film intellectuals closely associated with modernist visual culture, and with the ambitions of European avant-garde movements.

In the face of the inexorable spread of sound, the attitude of this 'anti-sound' lobby often seemed hopelessly idealistic. However, with the exception of 'impressionists' such as Germaine Dulac or Marcel L'Herbier, it is important to remember that the first critics of sound were essentially critics of dialogue-orientated cinema: it was 'talk' in particular, rather than sound in general, that perturbed them, and their arguments *against* sound were not necessarily arguments *for* silence. (Silent cinema was rarely – if ever – truly silent and, like any invention, film sound did not appear *sui generis*.)[4] Eisenstein, for example, did not argue against the institutionalization of synchronous sound *per se*, which he regarded as inevitable. Instead, his anxieties about the 'talking film' were provoked largely by the fact that the Soviet film industry was not

3 Michael North, 'International media, international modernism, and the struggle with sound', in Julian Murphet and Lydia Rainford (eds), *Literature and Visual Technologies: Writing after Cinema* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 52.

4 On the remarkable range of sound practices and musical accompaniments that existed during the 'silent' era, see: Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), and Richard Abel and Rick Altman (eds), *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

yet capable of competing with the USA (and Germany) in this area of film production. In other words, without the technological resources to protect the sound film from itself – so to speak – the cinema was in danger of regressing into the facile dramatic genres and theatrical forms of its infancy. For Eisenstein, the true destiny of the cinema as a popular art form lay in the development of dialectical montage techniques and not in pandering to Hollywood's intellectually inert preference for 'high cultural dramas' and filmed dialogue. The Soviet attitude to sound at this time was strongly supported by the editors of *Close Up*, the Geneva-based film journal that published an English-language version of 'The sound film: a statement from the USSR', co-authored by Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov.[5] Although never simply or unanimously 'anti-sound', the contributors to *Close Up* did develop a fairly coherent set of arguments in favour of silence during its short lifetime (1927–33). Like Eisenstein, figures such as Bryer (Winifred Ellerman), Ernst Betts and Dorothy Richardson also argued that synchronized speech jeopardized the internationalism of cinema, and undermined the nurturing of a culturally heterogeneous and artistically inventive (world) film culture.[6]

While other critics of sound during this period were less concerned with the nationalistic implications of its emergence, no one underestimated the aesthetic consequences of synchronous sound for an art form that was still struggling to secure broad intellectual credibility. Rudolf Arnheim, for example, argued that sound, like colour and alternative aspect ratios, undermined the artistic specificity of film – destroying the 'wondrously fragile' equilibrium between representation and distortion that was unique to this medium: 'the silent film, precisely because of its silence, was forced to be delightful'.[7] Béla Balázs was also concerned with the ways in which sound seemed to emasculate the essential qualities and artistic specificity of film art.[8] While Balázs – like Arnheim and *Close Up*'s Kenneth Macpherson – modified his general opposition to sound, his theory of 'sound-montage' did explicitly identify an expressive role for silence within the aesthetic structures of the sound film. Of all the arguments and anxieties that were generated by the coming of sound, Balázs's defence of silence remains the most constructive and suggestive.

The concept of 'visibility' was always integral to Balázs's argument that the cinema, particularly in its use of the closeup and montage, made the world newly visible. In his attempt to formulate a cogent aesthetics of the new art of film, Balázs asserted that one of the unique qualities of cinema was the way in which it – for the first time – made sound visible through silence. Silent cinema attenuated the visibility of the speech act because it represented speech as a purely visible phenomenon. In the silent film, the audience observed images of sound that were so strong, so convincing, that they forgot to remember that they were not hearing the sound of speech. The appreciation of sound was thus enhanced not simply by silence but by the secret revelation of the sources of sound, a

5 S.M. Eisenstein, W.I. Pudovkin and G.V. Alexandrov, 'Statement on sound (1928)', in Richard Talyor (ed.), *S.M. Eisenstein: Selected Works, Volume I: Writings, 1922–34* (London: BFI, 1988), pp. 113–14. In terms of Eisenstein's early theories of contrapuntal relations between images and sounds, see also his 'An unexpected juncture' (1928), in Taylor (ed.), *Selected Works, Volume I*, pp. 115–22.

6 James Donald, 'From silence to sound' in James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (eds), *Close Up: 1927–1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 79–82. See also North, 'International media, international modernism, and the struggle with sound', in Murphet and Rainford (eds), *Literature and Visual Technologies*, pp. 53-63.

7 Rudolf Arnheim, 'Sound film by force' (1931), in *Film Essays and Criticism*, trans. Brenda Benthien (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 42.

8 Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (London: Dennis Dobson, 1952); see particularly Chapter 16, 'Sound'.

revelation that was, according to Balázs, so powerful that it eliminated our need to hear and our desire to experience a synchronous relationship between a sound and its source. Throughout the 1920s, as sound technology became more sophisticated and synchronized sound more common, Balázs continued to argue that 'the visibility of sound' was fundamental to the uniqueness of cinema as an art form. However, Balázs also realized that sound, if liberated from the demands of narrative realism, could more readily contribute to the development of innovative cinematic techniques – new degrees of visibility – and, by the late 1920s, he had begun to theorize systematically on the nature and expressiveness of filmic silence within the sound film.

Broadly speaking, Balázs's later comments on silence fall into three categories: its acoustic qualities, its ostensible presence in the silent film, and its dramatic potential in the sound film. For Balázs, silence is an acoustic effect that cannot be perceived by means of 'hearing nothing'. Silence only occurs amidst sounds; it is a product of noise rather than a non-sonic phenomenon: 'Silence is when the buzzing of a fly on the window-pane fills the whole room with sound and the ticking of a clock smashes time into fragments with sledge-hammer blows'.[9] At one level, silence might then be said to have many functions but only one form, and it is at this undifferentiated level that silent film attempted to utilize silence. However, according to Balázs, the silent film could never reproduce silence: 'for its silence was not mute; it was given a voice in the background music, the landscapes and men and the objects surrounding them were shown on the screen against this musical background'.[10] Similarly, theatrical silence ('a theatrical cessation of the dialogue') merely imitates silence, or rather de-limits its expressive possibilities. Theatrical silence cannot resonate beyond a moment in the articulation of speech, or beyond the confines of stage space. This is not silence because 'the experience of silence is essentially a space experience',[11] it is merely part of the grammar of stage sound: '[on the stage,] the effect of silence can never be drawn out or made to last'.[12] The sound film, then, is the only art form capable of reproducing silence. Not only can sound create the dimensions of depth and duration required to make silence truly silent, but it can also invoke silence to transform the expressive power of the moving image itself: 'A silent glance can speak volumes; its soundlessness makes it more expressive because the facial movements of a silent figure may explain the reason for the silence, make us feel its weight, its menace, its tension . . . [in] the film, silence does not halt action even for an instant and such silent action gives even silence a living face'.[13]

It can seem a short step from Balázs's assessment of the acoustic, historical and dramaturgical character of filmic silence to the conclusion that these arguments promote a cinematic experience uncannily close to the phenomenological realism advocated by Bazin. However, if Balázs's formalist cast of mind seems compromised by his fascination with revelations from the incidental and the natural – not to mention the

9 Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, p. 206.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., p. 207.

13 Ibid.

assured lyricism of his prose – he himself saw no contradiction between an aesthetic sensibility and a materialist commitment to 'a theory of the film' that seeks to keep 'reality' at odds with the truth. Balázs's position on silence reminds us of the contradictions that characterize his writings on film; yet, it is these contradictions that often redeem his insights (and prose) from the descriptivist excesses of ordinary formalism. Balázs understood the necessity of an experimental approach to sound montage, and he was convinced that this was the only creative practice capable of giving silence 'a living face'. In this sense, he was the first major theorist to recognize that the coming of sound was also the coming of silence.

The diversity of positions that emerged – particularly within the formalist resistance to synchronous sound – is worth bearing in mind when considering the use of sound *with* silence in films produced at the dawning of the so-called 'sound era'. In all the turmoil that the advent of synchronized sound occasioned, it is easy to overlook the formal innovations of more mainstream directors in harnessing the dramatic potential of asynchronous sound-montage. In this regard, many 'silent sound' films of this period exemplify a response to developments in sound technology that augment, rather than impair, the aesthetic achievements of early cinema. A canon of such films would include: *Blackmail* (Alfred Hitchcock, British International, 1929), *Enthusiasm* (Dziga Vertov, VUFKU, 1930), *Â Nous la liberté* (René Clair, Tobis, 1931), *M* (Fritz Lang, Nero-Film, 1931), *Das Testament der Dr Mabuse* (Fritz Lang, Nero-Film, 1932), and *Vampyr* (Carl Dreyer, UFA, 1932). According to Noël Carroll, what is realized in these films is derived 'from a penchant for asynchronous sound based on a paradigm of montage juxtaposition as a means to manipulate, to interpret, and to reconstitute pro-filmic events'.[14] However, it may be the case that this 'penchant for asynchronous sound' was also derived from the fact that, throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the relationship between commercial filmmakers and avant-garde artists and theoreticians (particularly in Germany and France) was more intimate than ever before (or since). Arguably, the modernist dream of a cinema shaped by a productive symbiosis between film and the other arts (painting, music, architecture, theatre, poetry, and so on) was itself a casualty of the 'sound era' and its fetishization of sound–image synchronicity.

Films such as *Das Testament der Dr Mabuse* or *Vampyr* certainly share expressionistic motifs and themes, but their 'silent sound' aesthetic owes something in spirit, if not in substance, to the Bauhaus experiments of this period (for example, Kandinsky's 'colour music' and Moholy-Nagy's work on the geometric construction of silence), and to the work of graphic filmmakers such as Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling and Oskar Fischinger who, throughout the 1920s, attempted to extend into film their experiments with sound painting, tone colour, rhythmical imagery and aural animation.[15] Such associations recall Dadaism and Futurism (which directly influenced Vertov's early writings and experiments with sound), with its conception of 'a radio of silence'

14 Noël Carroll, 'Lang, Pabst and sound', in *Interpreting the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 93.

15 See Peter Wollen, 'Viking Eggeling', in *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 39–54.

(an aspiration that was partially realized by Orson Welles in the silences that remain the most disturbing and memorable feature of his famous *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast in 1938). Carroll also mentions Luis Buñuel's Surrealist masterpiece, *L'Âge d'Or* (1930), a 'silent sound' film that belongs alongside the work of Salvador Dali, Man Ray, René Clair and Benjamin Fondane:

> The wish of the silent film was to a large extent catastrophic: to suppress all speech and all logic which underpins speech and all conception of man which logic underpins. . . . All that cinema wanted was for the audience to lose its balance.[16]

16 Eric Freedman, 'The sounds of silence: Benjamin Fondane and the cinema', *Screen*, vol. 39, no. 3 (1998), p. 168.

Furthermore, directors like Hitchcock and Lang were keenly aware of cinematic developments within the avant gardes, and they were often eager to explore the implications of these practices for their own filmmaking ventures. Sequences in Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (Gainsborough, 1926), for example, are strongly influenced by prewar French Surrealist and Dadaist film, while his desire to involve Len Lye in the production of an animated sequence for *Secret Agent* (Gaumont/Rank, 1936) and his collaboration with Dali on *Spellbound* (Selznick IP, 1945) testify to an enduring enthusiasm for avant-garde forms and approaches. Similarly, Lang's collaborations with Ruttmann on Part One of *Die Nibelungen* (1924), and with Fischinger on *Die Frau im Mond/Woman in the Moon* (1929) – Lang's last silent film – suggest that the development of an experimental (that is, non-realistic) use of sound and silence created new abstract possibilities for all filmmakers of this period.

Situating such 'silent sound' films within the wider context of the European avant gardes also raises questions that challenge conventional treatments of the historical and aesthetic relationship between 'silent' and 'sound' cinema, and the place of silence within that relationship. The arrival of synchronized sound did not just herald the demise of the silent film; it obliterated an invaluable, if fragile, vision of cinema as an art form. With sound, a cinema that could derive its aesthetic specificity from the visual arts and music, a cinema of images, and images of images, was supplanted by a cinema of plots and protagonists, second-hand theatricality and filmed dialogue. The invention of sound, so orthodox film history asserts, was a definitive moment in the development of film language, and yet the construction of this definitive 'moment' (or 'moments' – 1895? 1905? 1927?) is itself contingent upon a teleology that has – amongst other things – culminated in the equation of silence with absence and nothingness. As Michel Chion has remarked: 'Although all histories of cinema allude to [the] plethora of experiments [between 1895 and 1927] to one extent or another, they don't challenge the neat division of film history into a silent period and a sound period'.[17] In short, this 'neat division' can conceal the extent to which the coming of sound chronically debilitated the cinema's capacity to experiment, and interact, with other visual arts. Instead of advancing, the cinema regressed, increasingly transforming itself into a base storytelling and

17 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 11.

slavishly commercial cultural venture. However, even in the midst of this seemingly terminal decline into synchronicity, continuity and filmic banality, some directors have still been able to find in silence a space for reconciling the cinema's present with its true past.

In *The Voice in Cinema*, Chion challenges the 'neat division' approach to film history by examining the ways in which the 'deafness' of early cinema continues to exist in the sound film's mise-en-scene, in its renderings of cinematic 'muteness' and in its presentation of the curious intercourse between bodiless voices and voiceless bodies. It is hardly coincidental, therefore, that Lang's *Das Testament der Dr Mabuse* and Hitchcock's *Psycho* (Universal, 1960) figure prominently in Chion's treatment of the disembodied voice. Central to Chion's analysis of the relationship between voice and image in audiovisual perception is the concept of the *acousmêtre*: 'a kind of voice–character specific to cinema that in most instances of cinematic narratives derives mysterious powers from being heard and not seen'.[18] In addition to generating suspense and/or signifying insanity or the presence of the supernatural, the *acousmêtre* can also function (a la Balázs) to make silence a visible subject within the sound film. Although the unseen voice and the silent character should not be confused with the character in the silent film, they still inhabit a profilmic environment that registers the absence of sound: 'So it's not so much the absence of voices that the talking film came to disrupt, as the spectator's freedom to imagine them in their own'. If '[voices] in silent film, because they are implied, are dreamed voices' then the *acousmêtre* 'allows us [again] to *dream the voices* – in fact, to *dream period*'.[19]

The acousmatic dimension, in a film such as *Das Testament der Dr Mabuse* or *Psycho* (or, according to Chion, *The Invisible Man* [James Whale, Universal, 1933], *Die Tausend Augen des Dr Mabuse/Thousand Eyes of Dr Mabuse* [Fritz Lang, CCI/Aristo, 1960], *The Wizard of Oz* [Victor Fleming, MGM, 1939], and so on), disrupts the illusion of audiovisual synchronicity, and redeems the essential ambiguity of the voice in 'silent' film. The persistence of silence through the concealment of a sonic source is an attractive notion. However, keeping the *acousmêtre* in the dark (so to speak) is easier said than done. For example, the difference between the expressive function of the *acousmêtre* in *Das Testament der Dr Mabuse* and its deployment in films such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *Dr No* (Terence Young, Eon, 1963) or *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, Hawk/MGM, 1968) can too readily seem coincidental, rather than fundamental, to this act of redemption. Chion's discussion of the mute character in the sound film, on the other hand, offers a more productive connection between 'sound' and 'silent' cinema: 'The silent ones of the sound film should bear no particular relation to the silent cinema, and yet. . . . In the modern cinema they can represent, by a sort of proxy, the memory of a great Lost Secret the silent movies kept'.[20]

The body without a voice, like the acousmatic voice, is a source of both diegetic and profilmic ambiguity. The mute in the sound film is both

18 Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 221.

19 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

20 Ibid., p. 95.

elusive and ubiquitous, both an absence and a presence: 'to encounter the mute is to encounter questions of identity, origins and desire'.[21] Chion briefly outlines the typical roles performed by the mute: as the 'double', 'shadow' or conscience of the protagonist (such as 'the Kid' [Dickie Moore] in *Out of the Past* [Jacques Tourneur, RKO, 1947]); as the enunciator and agent of retribution ('The man with no name' [Clint Eastwood] in Sergio Leone's 'dollars trilogy'); as the unobtainable object of desire (Gitone [Max Born] in *Fellini-Satyricon* [Federico Fellini, EPA, 1969]). Given that these dramatic roles are not necessarily specific to the cinema, Chion attaches an additional set of possible functions performed by the cinematic mute; functions that enable the body without a voice to 'refer back to the origins of cinema … [to the] "great secret" of silent film'.[22]

The mute accentuates the mise-en-scene of early cinema – masking, exclusion, off-screen space, and so on – and foregrounds an alternative cinematic economy of absence and presence. Furthermore, the mute, like his acousmatic counterpart, emphasizes the essentially unstable nature of 'language, speech and the voice in the cinema'. *India Song* (Marguerite Duras, Sunchild/Films Armorial, 1975), for example, creates a space for silence through its montage of 'an image track of voiceless bodies, mutes, moving about, and a soundtrack where disembodied voices speak among themselves'.[23]Chion also discusses *Les Enfants du paradis* (Marcel Carné, Pathé, 1954) in terms of how it exposes the historic antagonism between silent and sound cinema as little more than a reproduction of the age-old antagonism between pantomime and theatre. Not only does Carné's film suggest 'the abyss of mutism' ('which is what the talking film retrospectively constructed as its silent infancy'),[24] but – ultimately – it wagers on the possibility of retrieving silence:

> *Les Enfants du paradis* is … about a certain impossibility, a certain malediction at work in the relation between language and desire, and wherein the mute plays a role of revealer and of focus of projection. The film refers back to the myth of innocence and knowledge at the time of silent cinema, the guardian of the 'great secret'. [25]

There are some films – *Les Enfants du paradis* and *India Song*, for instance – that cherish this 'great secret', films that acknowledge the probability that only the innocent are entitled to a future; the rest have secrets and (as *Das Testament der Dr Mabuse* and *Psycho* intimate) the form of the secret is more meaningful than its content.

Writing in the late 1960s, Noël Burch welcomed the fact that certain European directors had 'at last begun to be aware of the dialectical role silence can play in relation to sound'. In particular, Burch commended the creative way in which 'these film-makers' were separating 'the "colours" of silence (a complete dead space on the sound track, studio silence, silence in the country, and so forth), [and were glimpsing] some of the structural roles such silences can play'.[26] Burch refers only to Jean-Luc Godard's *Deux ou trois choses que je sais*

21 Ibid., p. 96

22 Ibid., p. 100

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., pp. 105–106.

25 Ibid., p. 106

26 Noël Burch, 'On the structural use of sound', in *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 99–100.

d'elle/Two or Three Things that I Know About Her (Anoucka/Argos, 1967), but his comment (and this passing reference) suggests any number of other valid examples: Dreyer, Bresson, Tati, Fellini, Bergman, and Antonioni, for instance.[27] Within the cinema of such directors, rediscovering the spectrum of silence assisted in the creation of new aesthetic modalities, new ways of configuring alienation and fragmentation, absence and the asynchronicities of Being. However, the modernism of these directors does not reside in their supposed reaction against an intellectually impoverished (and politically insidious) cinema of narrative realism. If they articulate an argument, it is one that chiefly relates to the cinema and to a vision of the cinema that treasures its 'great secret'. Films such as *La notte* (Michelangelo Antonioni, Nepi, 1961), *The Silence* (Ingmar Bergman, Svensk, 1963), *Gertrud* (Carl Dreyer, Palladium, 1964) and *Vivre sa vie/My Life to Live* (Jean-Luc Godard, Pleiade, 1962), for example, encounter politics (in the widest sense) through aesthetics. These are films that rejuvenate the dream of a cinema of synthesis rather than one of antithesis: what they are *for* matters more than what they are *against*. At the heart of this 'project' then was a quest for the lost future of the cinema, a quest that combined an authentic appreciation of the achievements of early (and avant-garde) filmmaking with a spirit of intellectual generosity that could, amongst other things, rediscover a future for the cinema.

In *La notte*, Antonioni creates a soundscape in which the relationship between a noise and its source is approximate rather than exact. In such an environment, the dissonance between things and the sounds that they make begins to convey a sense of the world as a place where a universal silence is only ever interrupted by sounds, where even the sound of a footstep can never be synchronized with the image of a stepping foot. The boundaries between onscreen and offscreen sound *confuse*; the city and its noises (car horns, engines, sirens, a helicopter and even the sound of rust crumbling from the lock of a disused door) are noises that are already dead, already part of a past that here involves a writer who can no longer write, and a lover who can no longer love. Sounds are intrusive in *La notte*, profoundly inconsequential gestures that may scratch but can never puncture the firmament of silence that envelops the soul. The rituals and routines of life create a structure for communication but they cannot protect us, or our relationships, from being overwhelmed by the persistence of silence. The most significant moments in *La notte* are moments when silence itself is given 'a living face'. Lydia (Jeanne Moreau) sits in a car talking and laughing with Roberto (Giorgio Negro), but we hear nothing other than the incessant rain; Giovanni (Marcello Mastroianni) listens silently to Valentina's (Monica Vitti) recording of her reveries on life and solitude ('A garden's silence is made of sounds; press your ear to a tree and listen . . . '), which she then erases as if to remind Giovanni of his own spiritual 'muteness', his vanity. On the golf course – when the party is over – Giovanni listens to Lydia as she reads him a love letter that he had once written to her. He can no longer

27 For some analysis of silence in Fellini, see Christina Degli-Esposti, 'Voicing the silence in Federico Fellini's *La voce della luna*', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1994), pp. 42–53. A discussion of the relationship between sound and silence in Tati can be found in John Fawell's 'Sound and silence, image and invisibility in Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle*', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1 (1990), pp. 221–9.

recognize the sincerity of his own words. Giovanni has become an absent presence in his own life: lost, empty and silent.

There are expressive points and counterpoints here with both Dreyer and Bergman. In *Gertrud*, for example, silence carefully textures the film's lingering images of impossible dreams and disappointed desire. Conversations abound but they are always straining against the true uneventfulness of language, merging immaculately with Dreyer's long takes and the relentless immobility of the film's cinematography. The incessant naming of names, chiming of bells and ticking of clocks – the film's vertiginous cacophony of repetitions and reverberations – are part of the great refusal that Gertrude both resists and accepts. Her final farewell to Axel is little more than a look and a wave – a silent gesture that communicates everything. Similarly, in Bergman's *The Silence*, spoken language is as omnipresent as authentic communication is absent. As in Dreyer's film, the only sound that can begin to inhabit the spaces created by words and their meaninglessness is music. *The Silence* portrays the disintegration of a relationship between two sisters who are bound by the incestuous and deeply antagonistic nature of their relationship. The city, and the hotel in which they are staying, resonates with foreign voices and alien sounds. The underlying silence of everything is only interrupted when Ester (Ingrid Thulin) and the elderly waiter find themselves listening to a radio broadcast of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Suddenly, they realize that they share a common word, a word that breaks the spell of silence: 'music'. This simple coincidence of meaning is sufficient to initiate a relationship between the two that parallels the erotic relationship between the younger sister, Anna (Gunnel Lindblom), and the young waiter who works in a bar across the street from the hotel. The other source of mediation between the sisters, the true witness to 'the silence' that the film depicts, is Anna's young son, 'Johann'. Bergman's cinema, like that of Antonioni, is not a silent cinema but it is often a cinema of silence.

In *Vivre sa vie*, silence becomes an instrument of fragmentation, a base element that assists the processes of separation and reconciliation that are integral to Godard's artistic principles and practices. *Vivre sa vie* opposes the closed and facile synchronicities of narrative cinema by reconvening the elemental dialogue between images, texts, gestures and voices: for instance, the document and the fiction, Zola and Poe, Dreyer and Renoir, Montaigne and Parain, Anna Karina and Jean-Luc Godard. As in films such as *Bande à part*/*Band of Outsiders* (Anoucka/Orsay, 1964) or *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, Godard deploys silence 'dialectically', creating gaps and ellipses to texture his intricate tableau. A Brechtian influence is undeniable, but it should not be misunderstood. Godard's interruptions utilize the 'alienation effect' to transcend it: 'It is of course possible to understand [the] turn to Brecht in terms of politics . . . [but] it is probably more illuminating to think of Godard's engagement with Brecht in terms of modernism'.[28]

28 Colin MacCabe, *Godard: a Portrait of the Artist at 70* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 158.

Early in *Vivre sa vie*, Nana S. goes to the cinema with her brother. They watch Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) and Godard, who has already given us myriad closeup shots ('portraits') of Nana's face and profile uses *this* cinema to dissolve the difference between Nana and Joan/Falconetti. There are some shuffles and a whisper (an intrusive 'Tu connais?') as Godard's sequence creates a meeting of silence with silence. Nana's tears, like Joan's, are the tears of knowledge. This remarkable sequence itself revives the 'great secret' of the cinema, the secret of images and what images secrete. In *Vivre sa vie*, the disruption of sound, like the diffusion of citations and the rich coincidence of connections and disconnections, liberates the cinema from the prison house of narrative coherence and the illusion of synchronicity. Godard's cinema is a cinema of careful restoration rather than one of strident iconoclasm, and what it restores is nothing less that what the cinema once promised to itself but instead gave to others.

In one sense, the pessimism of those early directors, performers and writers was justified: the aesthetic authority of the moving image has been supplanted by an industrially determined cinema of formulae and narrative facility. This cinema has, of course, produced many masterpieces, but not *that* many (and in recent decades very few indeed). In another sense, sound invented silence and the traces of this 'invention' can still be detected in the sound cinema: in 'silent sound' films of the early 1930s; in the spectre of the *acousmêtre* and the gestures of the mute character; and in the discontinuities, ellipses and gaps created by postwar European modernists like Antonioni, Bergman, Godard and Dreyer. It continues to be very present in the abstract and 'non-representational' films of people such as Maya Deren, Andy Warhol, Michael Snow, Richard Serra, Stan Brakage and Nathaniel Dorsky, who have continued to manipulate silence in the pursuit of 'visual music', that is, releasing the music within the image itself, or 'capturing' the sound of light. In the documentary films of Chris Marker, Raymond Depardon, Johan van der Keuken and Errol Morris, an aesthetics of silence is often necessary for the articulation of fragility, uncertainty and despair. Indeed, it is also possible to apprehend the sound of silence in the work of other more contemporary figures, such as John Cassavetes, Andrei Tarkovski, Theo Angelopolous, Stanley Kubrick, David Lynch and Takeshi Kitano: 'For me, film is essentially silent'.[29] In truth, the 'great secret' of the cinema has not been lost, it has merely been scattered elsewhere and there will always be filmmakers willing to put their trust in what a moment of silence can deny, displace or disavow.

29 Takeshi Kitano, quoted in 'Good-As-Deadfellas: Howard Hampton on the films of Takeshi Kitano', *Artforum International*, vol. 55, no. 8 (1997), p. 72.

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cover illustration
Dream person scene in *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994)

Correction: In *Screen*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2006), we referred to Michael Renov's book *The Subject of Documentary* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004) as *The Subject in Documentary*. We apologise for this error.

The KTV aesthetic: popular music culture and contemporary Hong Kong cinema

BRIAN HU

Serious discourse on Hong Kong cinema both in the West and in Chinese academic circles developed through two major approaches. The first, of which David Bordwell's approach is characteristic,[1] valorizes Hong Kong film as an alternative art cinema. This claim considers the films and genres of Hong Kong film that are disseminated around the world and stresses the films' formal sensibilities and incessantly inventive craft. The second approach, of which the work of Ackbar Abbas is perhaps the best example,[2] discusses Hong Kong cinema as a product of the island's postcolonial situation, and the ways in which, culturally and politically, the 1997 handover to China affects its inhabitants and manifests itself in local film aesthetics.

In this paper, rather than proposing a third approach, I want to draw attention to issues which are absent in both these approaches, in particular, the issues of stardom and of popular music and culture. These are key issues whose absence seems to me to be remarkable given their centrality to the reception of Hong Kong cinema at the local level. In my discussion, therefore, I will draw first on theories of popular music in film. Then, using Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* (1994) as an example, I will argue that, since the familiarity of popular songs and popular singers does not magically disappear when filmgoers enter the movie theatre, we must consider the ways in which audiences 'use' such songs in other media – radio, television, fan magazines – in order to understand how they function in the medium of cinema. This is particularly the case in a cinema in which popular singers commonly

1 David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

2 Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

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double as actors, and in which the latest hits of the singer/actor are as eagerly anticipated as any action sequence or plot turn. In this way, I hope not only to correct the over-generalized appropriation of the category 'Hong Kong cinema', but also to introduce a new strategy of textual analysis into its study, a strategy of special importance now that the field is developing beyond the generality to consider issues such as genre, industry and transnationalism.

Traditionally, film music theorists have had difficulty placing popular songs within their theoretical frameworks, often relegating the phenomenon to brief mentions in the closing chapters of books on film music. For example, in her study of Hollywood music, Kathryn Kalinak includes a two-page mention of the pop song phenomenon, claiming that while 'the pop score initially challenged the classical model as a radical alternative', it ultimately 'continues to function structurally within the classical framework'.[3] In discussing the differences between pop scores and classical scores, Kalinak focuses on what pop scores cannot do that classical scores can (for example, they cannot maintain structural principles or directly illustrate narrative content), which leads her to incorporate pop scores as a weak subset of the classical Hollywood score rather than to consider the features of pop scores that define them as a quite different means of conveying information or engaging spectators. Similarly, Russell Lack organizes his 368-page book into major concepts in film music of the sound and silent eras, followed by notable exceptions that do not seem to fit into his larger argument. The exceptions include twenty-five pages on the pop music phenomenon, mostly in economic rather than filmic terms.[4] Even Claudia Gorbman in her seminal study of film music, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*,[5] saves the pop music phenomenon for a brief afterword, although to her credit Gorbman makes no attempt to integrate pop music into her greater thesis, only to note that the phenomenon poses new questions that would require a reworking of the standard assumptions of film music theory. The final paragraph of her book reads:

> Have listening habits and responses changed in response to commercial interests? Has it become 'normal' to listen to a rock song with lyrics at the same time as we follow a story? A semiotic phenomenology of the evolving relations between music and image, and, overall, of changes in the 'diegetic effect' or disposition of representation, needs to emerge. No less essential is an understanding of music's place in the changing relations among the recording industry, TV and video, and film. Music belongs to a number of systems, an economy of desire. What is being marketed, to whom, and how successfully? How does the market alter pleasure and demand?[6]

I want to pick up where Gorbman leaves off to answer her question about how audiences are responding to the emergence of pop music in film, and

3 Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), pp. 186–7.

4 Robert Lack, *Twenty Four Frames Under: a Buried History of Film Music* (London: Quartet Books, 1997), pp. 207–23.

5 Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: British Film Institute, 1987).

6 Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, p. 163.

how exactly their perception of pop music in film is related to their consumption of pop music in other media such as recorded music and television. A study of audiences and pop music in film would then necessarily include contextual considerations such as the economic imperatives of record labels and film studios, the consumption patterns and tastes of the kinds of audiences that watch films with pop songs, and the social and political environment for film/music production, exhibition and consumption. What Gorbman understands, and what I want to explore, is the fact that the perception of popular songs in film cannot be divorced from their life outside of the cinema because, unlike the 'classical' film score, pop songs already signify so much to the audiences who consume them in their everyday lives. Kalinak's claim that popular song scores still function in a classical narrative mode may be partly correct, but is far from sufficient; instead, an analysis of the function of the pop score must account for the ways film audiences create meaning (for example narrative meaning), bringing into consideration the ways in which they 'use' songs in their everyday audiovisual media experiences.

There have been some recent approaches to pop songs in film that have already begun to answer Gorbman's question. Among them, the most useful to my discussion of Hong Kong cinema is the study of movie studio/record industry synergy. Early in his book *The Sounds of Commerce*, Jeff Smith writes, 'We must first situate film music more generally within its economic, industrial, and historical context'.[7] He does exactly that, drawing from trade magazines such as *Variety* and *Billboard* in conjunction with previous studies of pop music to historicize the relationship between Hollywood and the recording industry, from the use of soundtracks as marketing tools to the effects on pop song selection as a result of media conglomeration. He then takes case studies of films such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Blake Edwards, 1961) and *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964) to explore in depth how the economic, industrial and historical contexts affect film production and reception.

Most interesting about Smith's approach, and what I attempt to expand in this paper, is that he does not describe the economic, industrial and historical context as an end in itself; instead, the lessons derived from an investigation of these contextual factors are used as the conditions for a more nuanced textual analysis. For example, Smith writes that Henry Mancini's economic imperative to deliver a hit soundtrack album for *Breakfast at Tiffany's* encouraged the composer to write one or two main themes (developed out of the chart-topping hit Moon River) and to punctuate the film's score with several light swing or Latin jazz numbers that may not have any narrative or structural value, but give the film, and especially the soundtrack album, a 'better value'.[8] Smith then proceeds to examine how each of these elements is used throughout the film. This approach combines the rigour of Kalinak and Gorbman's textual analyses[9] with studies of pop music in film that

7 Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 25.

8 Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce*, p. 79.

9 Gorbman's and Kalinak's work is primarily concerned with classical (non-popular) scores. Some good examples of rigorous textual analyses of popular songs in film are: Ian Garwood, 'Must you remember this? Orchestrating the "standard" pop song in *Sleepless in Seattle*', *Screen*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2000), pp. 282–98; and Jim Healy, 'All this is for us: the songs in *Thelma and Louise*', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1995), pp. 103–19.

concentrate on the issue from an economic perspective.[10] In this paper, I want to apply this integrated approach to an understanding of contemporary Hong Kong films that use pop music in very different ways from those of classic Hollywood. Like Smith, I will consider not only the economic factors that determine the supply of pop music film, but also the demand-side factors such as how audiences comprehend and desire pop songs based on how they use these songs in their everyday lives: on television, in concerts, or in karaoke boxes. I will begin with the industrial conditions from which popular music in Hong Kong film emerges.

As is the custom in Chinese cinemas ranging back to 1930s Shanghai, there is an unwritten 'no song, no movie' rule in popular Hong Kong cinema which persists today. As was the case with such classic Shanghai and Hong Kong stars as Zhou Xuan and Grace Chang, actors today thrive in a star system linked symbiotically with the recording industry. The most popular stars are often also the most played artists on the radio, and it is common for a popular singer to move into acting (dramatic ability is secondary), or an actor to become a singer. The fluidity of personnel between media is accepted, and even encouraged, by the media. (This is not the case in Hollywood, where a crossover artist is approached with scepticism,[11] or in Bollywood, where actors dance but their songs are almost always overdubbed by playback singers who are then the ones who become concert and album stars.) The 'musical' as a distinct genre in Hong Kong is less pronounced;[12] because so many actors are also singers, the 'no song, no movie' rule cuts across generic boundaries. This is most apparent in romances and comedies, but even a heroic bloodshed thriller like John Woo's *The Killer* (1989) has a theme song sung by Sally Yeh, the film's female lead, used heavily throughout the film to comment on the plot, to reveal Yeh's character, and to locate the film within the various 'taste constituencies' of Hong Kong's pop culture. Another example is the Tsui Hark-produced *The Swordsman* (1990), which features lead actor Sam Hui's theme song Hero of Heroes, a song which – along with the film – became such a hit in Hong Kong that it was parodied in the film's sequel, *Swordsman II* (1992).

In the late 1990s, Hong Kong's handover to mainland China weakened the film industry as many popular stars and directors left the colony for Hollywood. At the same time, accelerated globalization resulted in a rapid influx of American and other foreign films. Golden Harvest, perhaps the most dominant film production studio in Hong Kong during the 1980s, shifted its emphasis to the distribution of Hollywood films during the 1990s.[13] Setting aside their reluctance to replicate the industrial structure of Hollywood, studios in the late 1990s and early 2000s began to adopt Hollywood modes of financing to keep the dwindling industry afloat. 'Hollywoodizing Hong Kong cinema is regarded by the industry as the most promising way of rescuing the shrinking domestic market', writes Yingchi Chu. Chu singles out some effective and transferable strategies of the Hollywood system: the

10 For example see Lack, *Twenty Four Frames Under* and John Mundy, *Popular Music on Screen: From Hollywood Musical to Music Video* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

11 Examples include David Bowie, Sting, Prince, Bruce Willis, Eddie Murphy and Mick Jagger in the 1970s and 1980s, and Madonna, Mariah Carey, Tupac Shakur, Jennifer Lopez and Whitney Houston in the 1990s and 2000s. When these rare crossovers occur, it is a major media event and the question of acting and singing talent is the most discussed topic.

12 This is why Peter Chan's 2005 film *Perhaps Love* was dubbed Hong Kong's 'first' musical in decades. For an example, see 'Ruguo ai: gewu chuanqi aiqing' ['*Perhaps Love*: music and dance, strung together with love'], *People Daily* 7 December 2005, URL: http://world.people.com.cn/GB/1031/3922560.html [4 August 2006].

13 Yingchi Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 56.

seeking of funding from banks, the approval of scripts before shooting, a reliance on early publicity and cross-media promotions, and the use of cutting-edge special effects.[14]

14 Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema*, p. 126.

As a result, studios in this period slowly began to rely on soundtrack albums and music videos to promote films. Soundtracks had never been a big part of the Hong Kong film industry, and although they are currently becoming more popular, they are still reserved for certain special cases where they seem particularly marketable. It is customary for recording artists in Hong Kong and Taiwan to release one or two albums per year and also to star in a similar number of films per year; so it is likely that a new film (and its associated theme songs) will coincide with the release of a new album. This tends to make a soundtrack album at least redundant, and potentially confusing to the market. An exception which demonstrates the rule is superstar actor/singer Tony Leung Chiu-wai, who recently starred in the films *My Lucky Star* (Vincent Kok, 2003), *Infernal Affairs III* (Wai Keung Lan and Siu Fai Mak, 2003) and *Sound of Colors* (Joe Ma, 2003). In this instance, since he had not released a music album since 2002, soundtrack albums were released to make up for his recording lag.

It has been a feature of the recent trend towards 'Hollywoodizing' the Hong Kong film industry that studios have been more aggressive in the production of soundtrack albums as part of the marketing and profit maximization of their films. In 2003, the Hollywood studio, Warner Brothers, released its first Asian-language production, *Turn Left, Turn Right* (2003), and pitched a pop music campaign in the Hollywood mode. Before the film's release, the film studio wooed Warner Asia recording artists Sun Yanzi and Gigi Leung to record tracks for the soundtrack. They then released the music videos, complete with clips from the film, a month before the film appeared in the theatres. In this way, they simultaneously publicized the film, Sun and Leung's records, and the soundtrack for the film, and at the same time multiplied the revenue streams. The strategy was successful: both the film and the soundtrack shot to the top of their respective charts and the songs were nominated for Hong Kong Film Awards. Given the success of this marketing ploy, as well as the desire by local filmmakers to learn from Hollywood production strategies, it is likely that the trend towards soundtracks and music videos will dominate the future of the relationship between the two industries.

However, music videos and soundtrack albums are only two routes by which audiences encounter film-related pop songs outside of the films themselves. Other media such as karaoke, Karaoke TV (KTV) culture, fan magazines, concertgoing and popular music encourage audiences to bring the different worlds of popular songs into the film experience. I will now turn to the ways in which this characterizes the new interactions between film studios and record labels, and the ways in which filmmakers in Hong Kong are responding to these shifting economic relationships.

It may be helpful to begin by clarifying what I understand by 'the audience'. Not all Hong Kong audiences watch the same kinds of movies, nor do they all listen to the same (or any) popular music. It is, however, clear from recent film and record marketing strategies, and from the popularity of crossover superstars, that there is a large, identifiable segment of the filmgoing population which consumes both popular film and music, and which may serve as a 'target market'. This mainstream audience is held together not only by two symbiotic industries but also by popular media such as print culture and television entertainment news, all of which create a culture of gossip and news around multimedia superstars and celebrities. As in Hollywood, 'stars', and the discourse which surrounds their celebrity, are primary sources for 'infotainment', and hence for marketing. In Hong Kong, specifically, the star bridges two industries, and thus his or her image has dual dimensions when deployed on talk shows, billboards and magazines. Thus, when a star like Sammi Cheng appears on talk shows, she is not sometimes a singer and sometimes an actress depending on her latest project, but simultaneously both, drawing her celebrity from both media. She is expected to play off her tough, screwball image from movies even as she sings a song from her latest album. The consumers of these images in Hong Kong tend to be a particular demographic group which is 'in-the-know' when it comes to celebrity romances, popular biographies of current stars, and the latest music and movie releases. Gossip and infotainment culture, epitomized by tabloids like *Apple Daily*, *Oriental Daily News*, and the now defunct *EastWeek Magazine*, is widespread in Hong Kong, far eclipsing attempts by film criticism in mainstream journalism to 'refine' consumption. American *Time Magazine* columnist Richard Corliss writes:

> The Hong Kong showbiz scene has an appetite for sensation. The tiny Special Administration Region is crawling with movie stars and pop idols who are paid to be in public – presiding at boutique openings, promoting their CDs, shilling for breast-enhancement creams – and who, when they're on their own, can step in the usual amount of trouble. It's also got more gossipmongers and paparazzi per square inch than any place in the world, and dozens of newspapers, like *Apple Daily* and the *Oriental Daily News*, that are feverishly devoted to exposing the dark sides of bright people. The salacious news generated by this former colony makes U.S. tabloids seem lazy and reticent by comparison.[15]

The relative absence of any counter-discourse (such as film criticism) allows stars' publicity to reign. The nominees of recent Hong Kong Film Awards are precisely the people who populate the gossip pages – Cecilia Cheung, Carina Lau, Karen Mok, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Andy Lau and Aaron Kwok – all of whom are both movie and music stars. In addition, with the relative decline in popularity of local films in Hong Kong since 1997, it is becoming increasingly the case that star status is no longer

15 Richard Corliss, 'That old feeling: Hong Kong horrors!' *Time Online Edition*, 13 November 2002; URL: http://www.time.com/time/columnist/corliss/article/0,9565,388906,00.html [4 August 2006].

defined by the star's previous films (which are losing ground in popularity), but by reports of the star's latest scandal, which is relayed with aggressive regularity to a public which may have lost some of its appetite for local movies but not for local gossip. It is not surprising then that this public reacted with more enthusiasm to Gillian Chung's recent tabloid revelations than to her latest film *49 Days* (Lam Kin-Lung, 2006) or her album *Around the World with Eighty Dollars* (Twins, 2006).[16]

It is this large, gossip-hungry, knowledgeable segment of the mainstream Hong Kong population that I refer to in this article as 'the audience'. It is the presence of this 'knowing' audience which allows the Hong Kong film industry to use songs to activate the culture's cross-referentiality in order to define characters, to motivate narratives, and to engage audiences as potential or past consumers of popular music. The discussion which follows illustrates how this process operates within the text.

In Wai Keung Lau's film, *Dance of a Dream* (2001), a dance instructor played by superstar Andy Lau does an impromptu recreation of singer/actor Leslie Cheung's famous 2001 concert performance at which he sang onstage in a skirt designed by Jean-Paul Gaultier. The scene is noteworthy for being an unintegrated musical number, as if the star is taking a break from the plot to do a song and dance routine for the audience in the cinema. However, what is the audience to make of this peculiar moment? Since the scene is so split from the story, are we watching the dance instructor singing or are we watching Andy Lau, Heavenly King of screen and song, delight us with a musical showstopper? Is the fantasy of the diegesis broken by Lau's musical intermission, or was the fantasy always qualified by the two personas anyway?

To answer these questions, I turn to Michel Chion in his classic text on film sound, *Audio-Vision*.[17] Chion identifies three modes of listening: causal, semantic and reduced. In the case of *Dance of a Dream*, as well as those that follow, I will focus on causal listening, which Chion describes as 'listening to a sound in order to gather information about its cause (or source)'.[18] For example, when we hear the sound of a woman's voice, we use causal listening to determine her gender and age (through vocal timbre) and perhaps even her name or identity (if we recognize the voice). Causal listening is nearly always determined by the context of the sound, such as the image and other sounds. Most films are constructed in such a way that causal listening is facilitated through logical and consistent interactions between picture and sound, identified by Chion as the 'audiovisual contract'.[19] In a conventional Hollywood film, when we hear the sound of a man's voice from the speakers and see a man move his lips onscreen, we attribute the sound to the person of the man we see on the screen, not to an ADR artist dubbing the voice, nor to mechanical pulses emitted from a theatre speaker, nor to the vibration of vocal chords. This is the audiovisual contract between the audience and the film which structures our

16 Both the film and album did relatively well in Hong Kong, but Chung's paparazzi snapshots in the tabloid *EasyFinder* flew off the newsstands, leading vendors to demand more copies and initiating a massive and well-publicized outcry in the Hong Kong entertainment industry. *Yiben bianli* [*EasyFinder*], no. 761, 23 August 2006.

17 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994).

18 Ibid., p. 25.

19 Ibid., p. 28.

responses to sounds and images, and it is this contract which determines the ways in which we are expected to characterize and read Lau's performance in *Dance of a Dream*. As with most actors in Hong Kong cinema, Lau is prone to typecasting, and *Dance of a Dream* is no exception. The beginning of the film establishes his character as charismatic, conceited and talented: qualities that Lau wears proudly in most of his films. Furthermore, his character is a dance instructor, reminding the audience of Lau's other career as one of the most popular music acts in Hong Kong. If that were not enough, the last name of the character he plays is also Lau, further blurring the boundaries between character and star.[20] Thus, from the start of the film, we already read his character as more than simply Lau, the dance instructor, but as an extension of Lau, the star. Therefore, the audiovisual contract for this film rules that the source of his voice – the person on the screen – contains a number of dimensions: it is simultaneously the character, the actor and the singer. So the presence of the song half-way into the film does not break the fantasy of the story since that fantasy had already included the audience's extra-cinematic experiences of Lau from the very start of the film. Andy Lau, the singer, is bound into the world of the film and into the character which Andy Lau, the actor, plays. He is included in the audiovisual contract in all his dimensions in such a way that, when we hear Andy Lau, the actor, sing Leslie Cheung's classic song Wind Continues to Blow, we are simultaneously aware of the charisma of Andy Lau, the singer, flaunting his musical abilities; the confidence of Andy Lau, the actor, impersonating Cheung, another singer-actor; and the conceit of the talented dance instructor, Namson Lau, the fictional character. These are all bundled together to create both person and persona on the screen in a way which is multiple but coherent.

A result of the industry interactions between film, music, press, television and karaoke is an audiovisual terrain that encourages consumers to read textual signs by drawing connections across media. Rey Chow notes,

> This is a city life in which all productions – industrial, commercial, and economic – are dominated by another – the production of signs. The production of signs is at once superficial and abstract, in that it triggers meanings rather than concretizing them.[21]

On the lyrics of Hong Kong rock star, Luo Dayou, Chow writes,

> As signs and codes, the lyrics are intersemiotic with other signs such as those of fast food, mass communication, pocket novels, videos, karaoke, and so forth, in the sense that all such signs share a relation to postcolonial city culture, a relation that is legible only in its intersemioticity.[22]

Looking now at one of the most popular singer-actors in mainstream Hong Kong popular culture, Faye Wong, I will show various ways in which pop songs are structured within the film *Chungking Express*

20 It is then perhaps not coincidental that Lau's character in the *Infernal Affairs* series is named Lau Kin-ming and his character in Johnnie To's *Needing You . . .* (2002) is named Andy.

21 Rey Chow, 'Between colonizers: Hong Kong's postcolonial self-writing in the 1990s', *Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1992), reprinted in *Ethics After Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1998), p. 161.

22 Chow, 'Between colonizers', pp. 161–2.

(Wong Kar-wai, 1994). This structuring depends on precisely that intersemioticity of Hong Kong popular culture which Chow notes, engaging its audience through its existing knowledge of the singer and her songs, and in turn promoting Wong's latest CD release.

Critics have been quick to notice the innovative and distinctive use of pop songs in *Chungking Express*, whose soundtrack includes music as eclectic as 1960s rock, 1950s R&B, reggae, Cantonese opera, Bhangra and Cantopop. Stephen Teo has eloquently argued that the use of songs from around the globe contributes to the film's *durée*, or experience of the passing of time.[23] The film's *durée* is multicultural in a way specific to the spatial configurations of Hong Kong, best represented by the Chungking Mansions in the heart of Tsimshamtsui, a space well known as one in which businessmen, labourers, criminals and tourists from around the world collide. However, Teo does not consider the local working of the intersemiotic meanings of each musical element, instead treating each foreign song as simply one flavour in a multi-ethnic soup of global pop, a testament to 'Wong Kar-wai's post-modern style'.[24] More precise is Yeh Yueh-yu's observation about the kinds of sexual connotations associated with certain song genres: 'The music's hazy nationalities don't simply imply an ambiguity in its meaning. Black music in the two sections of *Chungking Express* is used to connote criminal but joyously lurid (hetero)sexual arousal'.[25] Yeh's approach considers the systems of musical desire, however essentialist and problematic, within the spectator. She does not, however, apply this approach to the other songs in the film, nor does she suggest that there are meanings and connections made by some audiences and not others. As a result, she fails to consider the ways Wong uses pop songs to evoke the local discourses surrounding Faye Wong, the singer, as they articulate with and colour Faye, the character.

Chungking Express is a definitive example of how the presence of an actor's song brings fan gossip and popular knowledge into the narrative. The 1994 film was the first foray onto the big screen for Faye Wong, already established as a 'pop goddess', and won her the best actress award at the Stockholm Film Festival and a nomination at the Hong Kong Film Awards. As I have suggested, fan gossip plays an enormous role in the discourse of the star in Hong Kong, and as the biggest music star of the early 1990s, Wong was among the most scrutinized and publicized celebrities in the popular consciousness. Born in Beijing, Wong moved to Hong Kong in 1987, and by 1989 had released her popular debut album under the stage name Shirley Wong. By the end of 1990, she had three platinum albums for Cinepoly Records. Then in 1991, according to popular legend, Wong decided to suspend her skyrocketing career and pack up her bags for New York City to 'discover herself'. She is quoted in a 1996 interview as saying:

> I wandered around, visited museums and sat at cafes. . . . There were so many strange, confident-looking people. They didn't care what other

23 Stephen Teo, *Wong Kar-wai* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), pp. 53–4.

24 Ibid.

25 Yeh Yueh-yu, *Gesheng Meiying: Gequ Xushi Yu Zhongwen Dianying* [*Phantom of the Music: Song Narration and Chinese-language Cinema*] (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Company, 2000), p. 211.

people thought of them. I felt I was originally like that too, independent and a little rebellious. But in Hong Kong I lost myself. I was shaped by others and became like a machine, a dress hanger. I had no personality and no sense of direction.[26]

26 Faye Wong, quoted in Anthony Speath, 'She did it her way', *Time International*, 14 October 1996.

After returning to Hong Kong in 1992, Wong shed her 'Shirley' stage name and became Faye Wong, releasing an album called *Coming Home* which featured the critically acclaimed hit The Woman Who Easily Gets Hurt, a dramatic departure from the usual love ballads of the Hong Kong pop industry and also from her first three albums. Wong became famous for criticizing publicly the formula-driven Canto-pop scene, producing songs her own way, choosing her own outfits, and covering songs by European pop/rock acts like The Cranberries and the Cocteau Twins.[27] Her next four albums took an edgier, more enigmatic turn, with decidedly non-mainstream (personal, rather than romantic) titles like *No Regrets* (1993), *A Hundred Thousand Whys* (1993), *Mystery* (1994) and *Random Thoughts* (1994).

27 Mike Levin, 'Reluctant idol Faye Wong', *Billboard*, 20 August 1994, p. 52.

One month after the release of *Random Thoughts*, Wong starred in *Chungking Express*, which featured two songs from her album. The film's borrowing from Wong's autobiography is unavoidable. Not only is her character also named Faye, but she is presented as a whimsical dreamer who has grown weary of Hong Kong and wants to escape to America. Working the register at a cousin's fast-food stand, Faye is depicted as an enigmatic loner. She falls in love with a policeman played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai, but instead of getting to know him by conventional romantic means, she sneaks into his slummy apartment during his lunch break and redecorates it. In her study of Wong Kar-wai's use of music, Yeh Yueh-yu argues that the Mamas and the Papas' California Dreamin' is 'Faye's song' in *Chungking Express* because it discursively represents her against Dinah Washington's What a Difference a Day Makes, which represents the policeman's ex-lover. She argues that 'the places in *Chungking Express* where "California Dreamin'" presides present, from a music fan's point of view, the most wonderful moments in the film'.[28] While I agree with Yeh that California Dreamin' not only modifies Wong's character but also 'transforms [the cop's] apartment into the space of Faye's daydreaming', I would contend that California Dreamin' does not represent the most pleasurable moments of the film because it does not observe the audiovisual contract between the film and the film's local audience, an audience which is not only conscious of, but probably a fan of, Wong and her music. As with Lau's character in *Dance of a Dream*, Wong is immediately configured as a composite of her offscreen persona: rebellious, mysterious and mischievous. Our relationship with the character Faye is built on our relationship with Wong the singer/actor, and therefore we become most enthralled by her character not when an American 'oldie' is on the soundtrack but when we actually hear her sing. In fact, the Mamas and the Papas' song

28 Yeh Yueh-yu, 'A life of its own: musical discourses in Wong Kar-wai's films', *Post Script*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1999), pp. 124–6.

becomes rather annoying by the third or fourth spin, but her cover of the Cranberries' hit Dreams from Wong's *Random Thoughts* album is exciting, fresh and spontaneous (much like her character) because it delivers the personal, distinctive Faye Wong performance her fans had been waiting for all along.

Retitled into Cantonese as *Moong joong yun*, or Dream Person, the song appears in what are perhaps the two most magical moments in the film: a montage in the music video style of Wong replacing sandals, clothes and toys in Tony Leung's room, and her return to Hong Kong, which ends the film and leads into the closing credits. Since *Random Thoughts* had already been released for a month, fans would have been familiar with its songs. With commercial savvy, Dream Person is limited to key scenes to prevent overexposure, yet it remains powerful enough to remind audiences that the hit song is currently available on record. The song's presence in the earlier scene is significant because it starts with the instrumental introduction of the song notable for being identical to the original Cranberries' version. Since every song up to this point has been a western song, the audience expects to hear the Cranberries' lead singer Dolores O'Riordan come in on the soundtrack – but instead it is Wong's voice they hear, sending a shock of recognition and exhilaration through the local audience. This, at last, is Wong's scene.

Wong had been Hong Kong's most popular female singer for too long for her distinctive vocal declamation to escape the attention of the local audience. Similarly, the presence of Dream Person at the end of the film is appropriate because it again reconnects Faye the character to Wong the star. The song symbolizes a more enlightened, mature return to Hong Kong, reinforced by the audience's knowledge of the song as part of Wong's post-New York professional and personal trajectory. Thus, because popular song is such a dominant signifier beyond the movie theatre, its presence in the movie theatre inevitably summons the song's and the singer's histories into the film, folding them into the narrative. In fact, the last shot of the film goes back to Wong's album. As the airy rush of the song's opening appears on the soundtrack, the camera tracks down to a CD player before cutting to the credits, as if to remind us not only of the CD player in the policeman's apartment, but also of the presence of Wong's CD in record stores across East Asia. Since the audiovisual contract installs Faye Wong, the singer, into the local audience's film experience and into the marketing of the film, it is no surprise that the film be asked to return the favour by publicizing her newest album.

Lyrics are possibly the most distinctive feature of the use of pop songs in film. Because of their linguistic communicative ability they work in a way which is different to the traditional 'classical' score, which depends on emotional cues defined by culturally accepted musical grammar (cadences complete musical ideas, a lively accordion

denotes festivity, and so on). Like a voiceover, lyrics can narrate directly the inner emotions of a character onscreen; and like the voiceover, lyrics can never be taken too literally. They often require mediation by the audience to create meaning. Just as voiceover narration must always be taken in the context of the film (an unreliable narrator is characteristic of a genre such as film noir), lyrics must also be contextualized. However, since the context of popular music spans far beyond the boundaries of the cinema, we must include in our contextualization the ways in which the audience has already appropriated and understood the lyrics which they have experienced on record or on the radio before they came to the film.

Dream Person is an interesting case because it is a new version of an already popular song. Covers and translations always draw suspicion because performers of remakes take already tested melodies instead of creating new ones. The suspicion draws listeners' attention to the variations and changes, thus it is in the variation that the meaning of the cover tends to reside. While the instrumentation in Wong's Dream Person is nearly identical to the original, the lyrics have been changed significantly, better fitting the Cantonese language as well as Wong's personality and her popular image as a mysterious romantic. The lyrics to the Cranberries' 1993 hit begin:

> Oh my life is changing everyday
> Every possible way
> Though my dreams, it's never quite as it seems
> Never quite as it seems
>
> I know I felt like this before
> But now I'm feeling it even more
> Because it came from you

Lead singer O'Riordan sings of a lover who appears before her like someone from her dreams. However, as the second stanza suggests, this lover surprises her because he is even better than she expected. Wong's version envisions the moment contained in these two stanzas quite differently:

> Person of my dreams, let's embrace for a minute
> Then kiss for ten minutes
> How can a stranger walk into my heart
> And cause this ecstasy?
>
> It seems that you and I were once in love
> and I've never been so close to you
> Thoughts start becoming outrageous

The most notable change is that, while O'Riordan's version looks optimistically into the future, Wong's version is in doubt about the past and looks into the future with great uncertainty. In the first stanza,

Wong urgently desires to kiss and embrace the stranger for as long as possible as if his presence were about to vanish. There is an emphasis on time limits and an anxiety over disappearance. While O'Riordan 'knows she felt like this before', Wong can only sing that she 'seems' to recall once being in love. The past is not clear, and Wong is restlessly in the present. We can assume that the listener to Wong's version was familiar with the Cranberries' Dreams, not only because Dreams was an international hit but because Wong's cover came out only a year after the original. Therefore, a local listener interested in why Wong would cover Dreams would notice the change from blissful optimism to romantic anxiety as it is translated into Cantonese. When Wong's version is inserted into the scene in *Chungking Express* in which she breaks into Tony Leung's apartment, the meaning of the lyrics is constructed differently for a 'knowing' listener familiar with the song's history. Through the extratexual meaning of the lyrics, the film is able to narrate a scene as well as convey an atmosphere of perpetual disappearance, an atmosphere which Abbas calls '*déjà disparu*' or 'the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone, and we are left holding a handful of clichés, or a cluster of memories of what has never been'.[29] Unlike the lyrics of songs in a musical, popular music lyrics in film are not expected to be literal because the audiovisual contract between image and popular song in Hong Kong films does not demand that they be so. In this way, popular song lyrics have a special versatility: the flexibility of the lyrics due to the multiple meanings that can be gleaned from the song's context outside of film allows the song to draw meaning from more than its words and notes, but also from entire histories and mythologies.

29 Abbas, *Hong Kong*, p. 25.

In addition to looking at the textual characteristics of the song (such as lyrics), audiences also assign meaning to songs based on the media the songs inhabit outside of the cinema. Here is where the term 'MTV aesthetic', frequently applied to Hong Kong cinema not only by the popular press but by scholars such as Abbas[30] and Bordwell,[31] reveals its limitations. Traditionally the term's deployment confines discussions to considerations of film style, often as a symptom of postmodernity, rather than focusing on how this particular style constructs narrative meanings and textual relations. I would argue that the 'MTV aesthetic' in film is not merely a stylistic characteristic but is instead a new form of engagement between film and audience, a relationship based on the fluidity of star and song discourses across media and a result of the intersemiotic nature of Hong Kong pop culture. To understand the engagement between the quick rhythmic editing and camera movements during a film's use of pop music, we must go beyond its postmodern 'cinema of attractions' and consider the actual cultural associations of the paying customer.

30 Ibid., p. 36.

31 Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, pp. 278–9.

The moving camera follows Wong on her emotional (mis)adventures.
Fig. 1
The Dream Person scene in *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994).

Fig. 2
The Music video for No Regrets (1993).

When Wong's Dream Person appears in the middle of *Chungking Express*, there is indeed a spectacle of sight and sound, but that excitement comes not only from the audial and visual stimuli but from the audience's uncanny recognition of the cinematic style as music video. In the preceding scene, the hand-held camera is shaky as it captures a conversation between Faye and the policeman, but the shakiness is there to heighten the observational nature of the camera. As soon as the song begins, however, the mobile camera sheds its status as the observer of a scene, and begins to express the character's inner world. Wong Kar-wai's improvisatory style serves this dizzying tone well. There is something improvised about Wong's movements, and about the movement of the camera which moves in and out with her, fascinated by her every move. In her

Faye enigmatically smiling for the camera in similar poses.
Fig. 3
The Dream Person scene in *Chungking Express*.

Fig. 4
The music video for Know Oneself and Each Other (1994).

video for the song, No Regrets, released a year before *Chungking Express*, the camera similarly follows a lovelorn Wong down expressionistic corridors, capturing her internal confusion. The rapid editing and constant movement of the camera (what could be called its 'MTV-ness') represents the restlessness of her psyche as narrated by the lyrics. The scene in Wong Kar-wai's film not only replicates the style of Wong's music videos, but also borrows her image from them (figures 1 and 2). There is a shot in the Dream Person segment where Wong gleefully mugs for the camera (figure 3). This is not representative of the passive, observational camera from preceding scenes, but instead draws the camera into the fun of being Faye Wong, in the same way as she mugs in front of the camera in her music video (figure 4). These techniques bring a

Fig. 5
Still from the Glass Slipper musical interlude in *Marry a Rich Man* (Vincent Kok, 2002).

Fig. 6
The corresponding moment in singer/actress Sammi Cheng's Glass Slipper karaoke video.

rush of recognition, allowing the audience to enlarge the frame of reference of the scene by relating it to its experiences of the star's image from other media, in particular here, from music video.[32]

What the film's borrowing of the audience's music video experiences suggests is that this so-called 'MTV aesthetic' is not simply an ecstatic style imposed on a passive audience, but a particular way of engaging a cognoscenti audience, drawing on and drawing in its extra-cinematic cultural experience. Instead of an 'MTV aesthetic', which has become a short-hand for a kind of drugged audiovisual passivity, I prefer the notion of a 'KTV aesthetic', an aesthetic which draws on the interactive mode of Karaoke TV which allows the audience to make meaning almost as much as the text itself does.

In Hong Kong, Taiwan and other Asian communities, KTV (Karaoke TV) is a cross between a Karaoke bar and a hotel, where patrons rent out rooms equipped with a television, couches and a karaoke system that

32 Hong Kong trans-medium fluidity between music video and cinema is not a one-way flow. A year later, the video for Faye Wong's song Vacation was uncannily reminiscent of her apartment scenes in *Chungking Express,* similarly showing Wong wandering aimlessly from bed to closet to sink to refrigerator and back again.

allows users to select the songs to be performed. Patrons typically come in large groups for various reasons: to party, to relax, to spar in singing competitions or to mingle with friends. Menus are provided and waiters come to the rooms to take orders for food and drinks. The KTV has its own culture; there are accepted rules that must be followed concerning participation, jeering, microphone passing, and so on. As Casey Man Kong Lum writes,

> it should be obvious that some form of collectivism and individualism does co-exist and intertwine in the karaoke space: that while a karaoke event is a collective activity for social interaction, it is also an opportunity for individuals to express themselves or, put metaphorically, to have a voice of their own.[33]

Karaoke videos with the vocals on are nearly identical to musical interludes in Hong Kong films. Both are edited like music videos, both feature the singer, usually in moments of personal or romantic reflection, and both have the song lyrics at the bottom of the screen (figures 5 and 6).[34] It is perhaps inevitable that the viewer of such a scene in a movie should take the audiovisual congruity between film and karaoke video as an opportunity to hone one's musical skills, particularly if he or she is watching the film at home or in private.[35] The musical interlude in a Hong Kong film therefore becomes more than a plot device, but an invitation for audience participation. Casey Man Kong Lum writes that 'karaoke participants are the producers of the performances in karaoke scenes. . . . In and of itself, karaoke music or songs are incomplete in their content'.[36] What I am suggesting about the specificity of Hong Kong film is that we can adopt this description of karaoke to understand the musical interlude in the films because the two media are so similar in sight and sound. When the moment arises in a film, we can say it is not a complete filmic performance unless there is a viewer to sing it back – either aloud or in one's head.

KTV/karaoke culture affects the way in which identification can be thought in these films. The apparent invitation to 'sing along' with the character, drawing on a range of cultural experiences and memories, is an invitation to identify in a different way: a kind of participation, a literal co-recitation of lyrics, which is distinct from conventional assumptions about identification exclusively through the gaze. The KTV aesthetic does not assume that a film exists in a cultural/aesthetic vacuum, but allows audiences to bring their total media experience into the film (and vice versa), and permits them to make their own meaning based on the audiovisual intersections (such as the presence of pop songs) between multiple cultural forms.

Because this phenomenon of popular music in film is both economic and aesthetic, it is misguided for the scholar of current film music to focus on one without considering its necessary relationship to the other. In current Hong Kong film, it is primarily through the discourse of stars

33 Casey Man Kong Lum, 'The karaoke dilemma: on the interaction between collectivism and individualism in the karaoke space', in Toru Mitsui and Shuhei Hosokawa (eds), *Karaoke Around the World: Global Technology, Local Singing* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 166.

34 Not all VCDs/DVDs of Hong Kong films subtitle song lyrics, but many do. Interestingly, Stephen Teo has also made the connection between the song number in Hong Kong film and karaoke, but in a completely different context. Teo notes that the song numbers in Mandarin cinema of the 1940s and 1950s could also be called karaoke in nature because all songs are subtitled (often with bouncing ball to guide the viewer/singer). See Stephen Teo, 'Oh, Karaoke!: Mandarin pop and musicals', The 17th Hong Kong International Film Festival, *Mandarin Films and Popular Songs: 40's–60's* (Hong Kong, 1993), pp. 32–6.

35 Hiroshi Ogawa writes of this phenomenon in relation to Japanese television shows and commercials. 'Now most hit songs are the theme songs of television dramas or image songs for television advertisements. . . . Users often check what songs will be used as theme songs or image songs in advance in order to practice singing these particular songs.' Hiroshi Ogawa, 'The effects of karaoke on music in Japan', in Toru Mitsui and Shuhei Hosokawa (eds), *Karaoke Around the World: Global Technology, Local Singing* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 50–51.

36 Casey Man Kong Lum, 'The karaoke dilemma', p. 18.

and music culture that pop songs are able to open film texts to audiences' experiences outside of cinema, and as gossip culture continues to maintain its grip on mainstream audiences' attentions, it is increasingly difficult to understand Hong Kong cinema without understanding the ways in which it engages its local audiences through their familiarity with a multimedia audiovisual space of stars, songs and cinematic spectacles enhanced by publicity music videos, simultaneous film and record release dates, and movie soundtracks.

Scholarship on Hong Kong cinema today has grown beyond the two approaches mentioned at the beginning of this essay. In addition to considerations of genre, industry, gender and nationalism, the audience has become one of the field's most active topics. Yet however thoughtful, necessary and full of surprises articles by Steve Fore, Anne T. Ciecko, David Desser and others are, they remain primarily focused on what US audiences bring to Hong Kong cinema.[37] Inspired by theories of postcolonialism and orientalism, these studies astutely tease out the ways in which gender and genre are rewritten or reinterpreted as Hong Kong cinema becomes an American industry. Absent in these studies are the audiences for Hong Kong cinema throughout Asia, Oceana, Europe, the Chinese diaspora and Hong Kong itself.[38] Each of these communities contains its own specific fissures, histories and markets, and thus each consumes, desires and interprets Hong Kong cinema in its own way. My argument has been that a 'KTV aesthetic', a mode of interactivity, intermedia and intersemiosis which is not accommodated by accounts derived from classical cinema, gives us a way of understanding the specificities of Hong Kong cinema and the particularities of its audience within their own defining contexts.

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37 Steve Fore, 'Transnational action: John Woo, Hong Kong, Hollywood', in Sheldon Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pp. 221–38; Annie T. Ciecko, 'Jackie Chan and the cultural dynamics of global entertainment', also in Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*. David Desser, 'The Kung Fu craze: Hong Kong Cinema's first American reception', in Poshek Fu and David Desser (eds), *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 19–43.

38 Notable exceptions include Meaghan Morris, Siu Leung Li and Stephen Chan Ching-ku (eds), *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), and some contributions to Laikwan Pang and Day Wong (eds), *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005). Law Kar and Frank Bren (eds), *Hong Kong Cinema: a Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004) is a useful transnational study of Hong Kong cinema that goes beyond the USA.

Ivan Sen and the art of the road

ADAM GALL AND FIONA PROBYN-RAPSEY

This essay considers the role of the road space in the films of Australian director Ivan Sen. In the three years between *Vanish* (1998) and the critically acclaimed feature-length *Beneath Clouds* (2001), Sen has developed a distinctive approach that highlights the ambivalence of the Australian road space and its relationship to postcolonial country, culture and history. Sen's films depict a photographic, flaneurial attention to the road and what lies beneath it and beside it. His films do not hurtle down the road at top speed with a sense of frenetic escape, but are composed at walking pace. As Paul Carter notes, the history of European colonization in Australia is also the history of roads,[1] and this affects what stories Australian road films might carry. When placed beside the road film as it has come to be understood, Sen's films appear both to occupy the genre and to be at odds with it. Sen apparently 'shifted uncomfortably' when told by Daniel Browning that *Beneath Clouds* could be seen as a 'blackfella road movie'.[2] This discomfort may relate to the ways in which both categories 'blackfella' and 'road movie' do not capture the complexities of the film's representations of Aboriginal and white Australians. Nor does the description reflect the film's departures from the road movie genre, a genre which, more than others it seems, tends to be read by critics along the lines of 'national' tropes. Sen's films are not straightforward road films, but they do show a fascination with the road at the limit of generic expectations. In the first section of this essay we discuss three of Sen's short films *Vanish* (1998), *Tears* (1998) and *Dust* (2000). The middle section addresses the road film as genre and its readings within Australianist[3] discourse, while the last section focuses on Sen's feature film, *Beneath Clouds* (2001), and its inflection of the road film genre.

1 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: an Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988); see also Ross Gibson, *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002).

2 In an interview with Ivan Sen, Daniel Browning goes on to report that 'only after a short pause . . . did I realize that's not what he – as both writer and director – intended'. See Daniel Browning, 'Ivan Sen interview', *Awaye!* (radio programme, tx., 15 March 2002); URL: http://www.abc.net.au/message/radio/awaye/ms_opera/ivan_interview.htm. For background on Sen, see http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/Eng/rose/sen_i.htm [16 September 2006].

3 We use the term 'Australianist' here to describe readings which are not simply produced in the geographic location 'Australia' but which produce 'Australia' as an object bearing a 'national cinema'. Australianist discourses are deployed to demonstrate the differences between Australian and US versions of the road film. The term Australianist here refers to this assertion of difference from the USA and the gathering of many films into a 'national cinema'.

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The road is one of those taken-for-granted places that insinuate themselves into our lives not simply as bitumen or path, but also as a way of *thinking*. Cinematographically, roads create 'natural' lines of perspective and have compositional elements that can be manipulated to highlight how the framing of a story can tell us as much as the dialogue itself. When we are *thinking* about cinema and roads, it might be a road metaphor that takes us in another direction, down another route, track or path. This dead metaphor of the road has become a 'material semiotic'[4] form of *knowing*. Texts which attempt radically to critique accounts of white cultural appropriations of indigenous culture are themselves articulated with reference to the road, as in Karen Jennings's conclusion to *Sites of Difference*, a book which seeks to generate culturally heterogeneous accounts of Aboriginality. Jennings hopes to 'plot a route through the discursive field of Aboriginal filmic representations. My path has needed to be both wide and narrow.'[5] Similarly Georgina Clarsen, in her reading of *Bush Mechanics*, argues that 'stretching the car metaphor in another direction may perhaps move us along'.[6] More recently, Felicity Collins and Therese Davis argue that Australian cinema since the Mabo decision[7] is marked by what they call 'backtracking' and 'going over some old ground'.[8] These examples demonstrate yet again that the road is a device for thinking; not surprisingly it lends itself to illustrate whole networks of ideas such as 'modernity'[9] and even 'nation'.[10]

The traditional road movie may have been counter-discursive in relation to 1960s youth culture[11] and post-Vietnam US culture,[12] but it does not necessarily gel with postcolonial politics in contemporary Australia. While road movies in the USA are posited as going 'back to the nation's frontier ethos',[13] in which the road signifies 'an empty expanse, a tabula rasa, the last true frontier',[14] such a *terra nullius* image now rings hollow in postcolonial Australian cinema and culture. The road forms part of a network that is already tied up in histories (past and present) of colonialism and modernity. Indeed, establishing a network of transportation and communication technologies is necessary to the conduct of colonization, and the sophistication of such networks accounts for the breadth of scope of imperialism in the late nineteenth century.[15] In past histories of colonization, and of nineteenth-century imperialism particularly, the role of the steamboat and the railway in the penetration of continental landmasses is central. Roads, while not a technology specific to imperialism, come to form part of this network, whether they pre-exist contact or are built after it. Arguably, in Australian history, built roads are more specific to the practices of colonization and development, and have facilitated and maintained colonization and dispossession.

Sen's films demonstrate that a 'road to freedom' does not lead to 'nowhere', to a *terra nullius*, but leads into, onto and through someone else's already culturally inscribed land. As Tony Birch points out in relation to *Beneath Clouds* 'as in indigenous culture, the land itself is the

4 Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.

5 Karen Jennings *Sites of Difference: Cinematic Representations of Aboriginality and Gender* (South Melbourne: Australian Film Institute, Research and Information Centre, 1993), p. 76.

6 Georgine Clarsen, 'Still moving: *Bush Mechanics* in the central desert', *Australian Humanities Review* (March 2002), p. 10. URL: http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-March-2002/clarsen.html [16 September 2006].

7 The Australian High Court's Mabo decision (1992) represents the first land rights case which established Native Title for indigenous people in Murray Island. The case overturned the legal fiction of *terra nullius* (land occupied by no one recognizable to European systems of sovereignty), by which European colonization occurred. Native Title, made possible by the Mabo decision, fell short of recognizing Aboriginal Sovereignty, which is still being campaigned for today.

8 Felicity Collins and Therese Davis, *Australian Cinema After Mabo* (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.

9 See Daniel Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002); and Timothy Corrigan, 'Genre, gender, and hysteria: the road movie in outer space', in *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies, Culture after Vietnam* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

10 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

11 Laderman, *Driving Visions.*

12 Corrigan, 'Genre, gender, and hysteria'.

13 Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *The Road Movie Book* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 1.

14 Dargis, quoted in Cohan and Hark (eds), *The Road Movie Book*, p. 1.

15 Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1981); see also Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay.*

repository of historical memory'.[16] In Sen's films, it is often Aboriginal characters who are perceived by whites as 'trespassers' in spaces dominated by whites (roads, cotton fields, corn fields, pubs, cafes). Sen's films emphasize the 'somewhereness' of land and place by focusing on the contested nature of spaces beside the road, beneath the road and off the road. This is clear in three of Sen's short films in which the road plays an important compositional and narrative role.

Much of Sen's technique of manipulating the compositional elements of the road can be seen in his early documentary film, a personal and lyrical meditation called *Vanish. Vanish* traces the Gamilaroi people's forcible movement into the Euraba reserve in 1912, then to the Old Toomelah reserve in 1927, and then, in 1937, to Toomelah Mission. Each interview with elderly and younger residents of the nearby towns has them dissolving in and out of the sequence. In the case of Aunty Flo, Aunty Ruby and Craig, a road joins the foreground with the background landscape. Roads illustrate the depth of space behind the subjects, who are positioned right at the edge of the frame. This way the road becomes a curiously centred space against which Sen's subjects are marginalized, framed off-centre. The history of forced removal and forced movement drives an association between movement and *vanishing*, thus providing grounds for the slowness of the images, the still, wide-angle shots of land, machinery, roads and roadscapes. To consider the stillness of these shots is to think through the forced movement of the people he interviews, forced movement thus acting as counterpoint to slow, still, landscape shots. Each interviewee is recentred through the patient attention to their faces, words, pauses. Sen's interview technique and the editing suggest another important emphasis on speed – the long pauses in the interview with Aunty Beano and Craig illustrating the awkwardness of, and commitment to, the interviewee/interviewer relationship. It serves as a reminder of the time it takes to allow these stories to be told and the responsibility of the listener to be patient, to listen, to be quiet. This does not sit well with the traditional road film's emphasis on speed, as brought out by another documentary road film, *Beating About the Bush* (Caroline Sherwood and Nicholas Adler, 1993), in which Peter Rothmanus challenges the white filmmakers: 'You've got to be here [in the Aboriginal community] for ten or twelve years before you can start to bring proper issues out'.[17] Sen's pauses and his attention to gaps in the narrative, uncertainties, shyness, indicate the time and space that is necessary to attempt to read and hear stories of Aboriginal movement and belonging. The 'gaps' in time between the answers and the questions also indicate points of no entry (no road) for the viewer: there are going to be many points in this film that are unavailable to the viewer, especially if they are non-Aboriginal.[18] Christos Tsolkias's review of *Beneath Clouds* in *Senses of Cinema* demonstrates that such silences and pauses are intensely provocative to a dominant culture which demands that Aboriginal subjects speak their subjectivity, share their stories openly, quickly and straightforwardly. To quote

16 Tony Birch 'Surveillance, identity and historical memory in Ivan Sen's *Beneath Clouds*', in Nikos Papastergiadis and Scott McGuire (eds), *Empire, Ruins and Networks: The Transcultural Agenda in Art* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. 198.

17 For further discussion of this film see Fiona Probyn-Rapsey 'Bitumen films in postcolonial Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies,* vol. 88 (2007), pp. 51–60.

18 See also Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, 'The ethics of following: trackers, followers and fanatics', in *Australian Humanities Review,* no. 37 (December 2005). URL: http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-December-2005/Probyn.html [16 September 2006].

Tsolkias: 'There is intelligence at work here, but after a while I wanted someone to talk, to articulate, and to argue'.[19] Tsolkias's 'want' reflects his reading position and misses the point of how the dialogue occurs in the film. He reads muteness as the *film's* problem. Alternatively we could read the *demand* for speech and argument as the problem.

Tears is a short film on which the feature *Beneath Clouds* is based. *Tears*, like *Vanish*, also utilizes a drastic slowing down of movement. Unlike much of the history behind *Vanish*, the movement of the Aboriginal characters in this short film is more self-directed: 'Do you wanna stay in this shithole forever?', Lena (Jamila Frail) asks Vaughn (Luke Carroll). They begin their walk away from the mission. Walking along the roadside, the shots hold a large sky and closeups of the characters' faces towards the edge of the frame, again suggesting a depth of country behind them. Vaughn struggles along the side of the road on crutches while Lena walks determinedly ahead. A Ford Falcon pulls up with friends from the mission: young men in the front seat, a young woman and child in the back. Vaughn is told that the cops are looking for him. Lena looks into the back of a vehicle at a screaming toddler with flies on her face, held by a young mother. She manages a curious half-smile at the girl, while the slow-motion camerawork suggests something elemental about this image of the girl (Lena's future, if she were to stay). A similar image occurs in *Beneath Clouds* as a young woman pushes a pram over difficult terrain past Lena. An image of a girl pushing a pram away from the camera also ends one sequence of *Vanish*.

In *Tears*, images of death and decay loom in the road. A dead kangaroo, in closeup and in the foreground as they walk off, suggests a decomposition of life around them. Dust caused by a car passing them makes the road behind them hazy and indefinite, like memory and erasure as it is depicted in Sen's other film *Dust. Tears* cuts from one image to the next as in a slide show without voiceover: an unused child's slide, an old watertank, a deserted street. Decaying road signs also loom large above: a 'T-intersection', obscured with white paint or corrosion, a decaying sign of a highway number, half of a bus stop sign on a pole ('us op') above Vaughn in the final scene. Lena leaves on the bus with Vaughn watching before the bus dissolves (vanishes) out of shot, as if melted away by the haze made by the sun, suggesting the slow movement of time in Vaughn's immobility at the bus stop, looking down at his feet, rather than at the tracks of the bus taking Lena away.

Sen's other short film, *Dust*, highlights the significance of what lies just beneath the surface; in this case it is the land off the side of the road, in a cotton field. The film opens with a line of cars on a dusty road heading towards the aptly named Bald Hill. The dust is everywhere. The driver of the vehicle is Leroy (Clayton Munro), with passengers Vance (Wayne Munro) and an elderly woman in the backseat, Ruby or Mum (Reta Binge), who says ominously, 'may get a storm later on'. The roadsigns are also ominous – 'Slaughter Creek' – then two different shots of 'No Trespassing', the juxtaposition signalling land seized and

19 Christos Tsolkias, 'Through clouds: a discussion of *Kandahar* and *Beneath Clouds*', *Senses of Cinema*, no. 20 (2002), p. 4.

named after a massacre, and then 'protected' by white law. Sen uses road signs again to flag the narrative. In another car we see a young white couple, Mick (Tristan Bancks) and Amy (Nathalie Roy), drive up and park. Mick complains that the other workers are 'fuckin' coons'. Sexual jealousy over the white girl arises with Mick telling the girl: 'I saw you back there . . . don't fucking look at him, he's a fucking coon'. Leroy and Mick have more in common than disapproval of interracial relationships; when a police car arrives, both are under suspicion; Amy looks to Mick while Vance looks to Leroy. Both turn and run but the cop grabs someone else and drags him off. A shot of Ruby, where we look into her eyes in closeup, suggests that she has seen all this – the removal of children – before. Leroy worries about Mum as she collapses on to her knees in the field in the distance: 'She's going fuckin' crazy, bro'.' A dust storm whips up and all are forced to race back to their parked cars to seek shelter. Mick and Amy do not make it back to theirs so Vance calls them into their Falcon where all sit out the storm uneasily. When they get into the car Mum is sitting in the front seat, indicating a shift in the film's perspective. Rarely do the women occupy the front seat in Sen's films. She tells them 'Bad things are happening all around here. They rounded up your people, women and kids too. Bad things. Old mum told me a long time ago, now I tell you.' The dust storm settles, they get out of the car to see bleached bones and skulls revealed in the dirt. As the road sign said, this is 'Slaughter Creek'. A series of closeups of shared gazes tells us the story of recognition and contrition. A sunset shot shows them standing high in the landscape and then they vanish, again dissolving into the land, land that outlasts their presence on film.

Attempting to define these films in terms of cinematic genre is a difficult task. Genres are constellations of cultural products that share narrative structures, stylistic conventions, archetypal characters and situations as well as relationships with institutional and social structures. Given that the road, the road journey and the relationship to country features in all of these films, it is possible to link them to the road film. Indeed, Sen's feature-length film *Beneath Clouds* was uniformly described as a road movie (in Collins and Davis, and Tsolkias, for example). However, this does not mean that it is a 'road film' like any other. As we have argued, road films do not translate smoothly across borders.

Critics in countries other than the USA and Australia have pondered the significance of the road film. Eyerman and Lofgren have analyzed a different 'cultural habitus of the road' in Sweden through its road films, and have found that the 'basic theme of road movies, "risking it", has little resonance with Swedish conceptions of personal challenge and social mobility'.[20] Added to this, the concept of 'taking to the road' is 'difficult to translate into Swedish',[21] and fear of the unfamiliar is less apparent in the films, given that Sweden is identified as 'such a relatively homogenous culture.'[22] Susan Picken finds that the 'mythology of the road never quite took hold of the British imagination the way it did the

20 Ron Eyerman and Orvar Lofgren, 'Romancing the road: road movies and images of mobility', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1995), p. 73.

21 Ibid., p. 72.

22 Ibid.

American' because its roads are rather 'brief'.[23] Accordingly, she finds that British road films concern 'contemplation rather than conquest'.[24] Sen's films, focusing primarily on Aboriginal people in north-western New South Wales, are culturally specific in their inflection of the genre. Here we emphasize their *departure* from the genre, rather than attempting to shore it up with more examples of its expanding boundaries.

Australian critics also tend to read the road film genre, perhaps even more than other genres, in terms of its 'Australian-ness' (Susan Dermody and Liz Jacka,[25] Delia Falconer,[26] Meaghan Morris,[27] Collins and Davis, Stephen Muecke[28] and Tsolkias), with Jonathan Rayner's description being fairly typical: the road film as a 'site for the definition of Australianness and the exploration of specific Australian concerns'.[29] Part of the reason for this slippage between road film and nation is that the road is, as Benedict Anderson suggests, so much a manifestation of the nation-state in its marking of territorial borders that it seems overdetermined. Falconer, Morris, Muecke, Rayner and Rama Venakatasawmy et al.[30] have all written about the Australianness of Australian road films, isolating what it is that renders them different to US road movies. Delia Falconer has argued that Australian road films like George Miller's *Mad Max* trilogy (1979, 1981, 1985) articulate a particularly Australian and postcolonial anxiety which sees them move away from British models of occupation toward the US fetish of the road and car.[31] Moreover, Falconer argues that Mad Max is metonymic of the Australian film and tourism industry itself, breaking into the US or global market by appealing to specific Australian anxieties about its own economic viability. Venkatasawmy, Catherine Simpson and Tanja Visovesic argue that the Australian road film differs from the US genre in terms of narrative (the inability to cross borders or escape to another country) and in terms of its genealogy. They argue that Australian road films can be traced back to early bushranger and drover narratives (*The Overlanders* [Harry Watt, 1946], Ned Kelly films and documentaries such as *Back of Beyond* [Michael Robertson, 1995]), while contemporary road films are often combined with other genres, such as social realist, sci-fi apocalyptic, thriller, comedy or urban road film.[32] Rayner reads Australian road movies as being 'downbeat', not 'uniformly positive, restorative or transformative'. The films, he argues show a 'futility of action or movement' and characters 'for whom control over events or circumstances is lost or never gained'. Furthermore, he suggests that 'the road symbolizes a postponement of the task of addressing problematic issues, but offers no chance of evading them conclusively'.[33] Such a view of the melancholic nature of Australian cinema is also taken up by Collins and Davis in their account of recent, post-Mabo Australian cinema of all genres. They take the 'anxiety and ambivalence which seems endemic to Australian nationhood and to Australian cinema'[34] and relate it specifically to a post-Mabo cultural melancholia. They argue that national cinema between 2000 and 2002 produced a cycle of 'strangely belated' films which revisited or *backtracked* over 'certain familiar

23 Susan Picken, 'Highways, by-ways and lay-bys: the Great British road movie', in Jack Sargeant and Stephanie Watson (eds), *Lost Highways: an Illustrated History of the Road Movie* (London: Creation Books, 2000), pp. 221–9.

24 Ibid.

25 Susan Dermody and Liz Jacka *The Screening of Australia*, vol. 2 (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988).

26 Delia Falconer 'We don't need to know the way home: The disappearance of the road in the Mad Max Trilogy', in Cohan and Hark (eds), *The Road Movie Book*, pp. 249–71.

27 Meaghan Morris, 'White panic or, *Mad Max* and the Sublime', *Senses of Cinema*, no. 18 (2002). http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/18/mad_max.html [16 September 2006].

28 Stephen Muecke, *No Road: Bitumen all the Way* (South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997). See also Stephen Muecke, '*Backroads*: from identity to interval', *Senses of Cinema*, no. 17 (December 2001). URL: http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/backroads.html [16 September 2006].

29 Jonathan Rayner, 'Loop the loop and crash head on: Australian road movies', in Sargeant and Watson (eds), *Lost Highways*, p. 101.

30 Rama Venkatasawny, Catherine Simpson and Tanja Visosevic, 'From sand to bitumen, from bushrangers to "Bogans": mapping the Australian road movie', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 70 (December 2001), pp. 75–84.

31 Falconer, 'We don't need to know the way home', p. 253.

32 Venkatasawmy Simpson and Visosevic, 'From sand to bitumen', p. 80.

33 Rayner, 'Loop the loop and crash head on', p. 112.

34 Collins and Davis, *Australian Cinema After Mabo*, p. 7.

figures such as the black tracker, the lost child, the bush battler, and the Australian landscape itself'.[35] Collins and Davis suggest that the Mabo decision promoted a 'rupture in the continuity of Australian history'[36] and that, since the Mabo decision, there has been the 'recognition of historical amnesia (rather than an unknowable, sublime, interior void) as the founding structure of settler Australia's myths of belonging'.[37] Since Mabo, the landscape, they argue, has become a 'land with a history',[38] producing a cinematic 'aftershock' which 'implies that indigenous and settler Australians alike are still living through the unresolved trauma of colonial settlement'.[39]

Readings that presuppose the existence of a national cinema are problematic for a number of reasons, not least because it can make critique read like the work of an upstanding citizen. Writing the cinematic history of a nation has similar limitations to writing a biography of the dead: a life unravels with a clear middle, beginning and end, events become parts of a whole, building blocks of a grand, bitumenized, narrative. This approach can sometimes overlook the seemingly inconsequential, aberrant parts, 'subjugated knowledges'[40] and differences *within* the nation. Writing which maps narratives on to nations[41] reinforces the ways in which the nation is itself a product of precisely this kind of epistemological approach. In a review of *Australian Cinema After Mabo*, Catherine Simpson notes that the 'unifying process is extremely important in the context of a comparatively small domestic cinema that lacks a niche. We do need to be wary, however, of disavowing the diversity of Australian cinema product for the sake of creating unity.'[42] Not surprisingly, readings which require that Aboriginal or Australian filmmakers reflect the nation tend to find them always *lacking*,[43] as in Tsolkias' comment that 'the brutality of the Australian landscape deserves something more'[44] than *Beneath Clouds* can offer it. Similarly, Brian McFarlane, in his reading of Australian cinema, backtracking and racial bigotry (in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* [Phillip Noyce, 2002], *The Tracker* [Rolf de Heer, 2002], *Black and White* [Craig Lahiff, 2002] and *Australian Rules* [Paul Goldmain, 2002]), finds that 'not any of these films quite measures up to these demands'.[45] Collins and Davis's use of 'backtracking' to describe recent Australian cinema indicates a melancholic attachment to 'national' trauma/cinema.

It is possible that the 'lack' in these 'national' films is not a problem stemming from the films themselves, but rather from the attempt to match cinema to nation. In other words, the 'lack' is ascribed to the films rather than to the methodology. Readings which attempt to map the road film onto the nation can miss one of the genre's defining features which is, according to Corrigan, its 'compulsion to dramatize its failures to repress and contain'.[46] If the genre cannot 'repress and contain', then readings which posit a nation as *the* container attempt to do what the genre cannot, thereby betraying its difference.

The other reason that we resist the 'nationalizing' of Sen's films is because this would assume a common language for reading 'the' nation.

35 Ibid., p. 8.

36 Ibid., p. 9.

37 Ibid., p. 76.

38 Ibid., p. 78.

39 Ibid., p. 81.

40 See Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, trans. and ed. Colin Gordon et al. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980).

41 See Homi Bhabha, *Nations and Narrations* (London: Routledge, 1990).

42 Catherine Simpson, 'Beyond glitter to grief: Catherine Simpson reviews *Australian Cinema After Mabo* by Felicity Collins and Therese Davis', *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 34 (2005).

43 As Bhabha relates, 'the native intellectual who identifies the people with the "true national character" will be disappointed'; Homi Bhabha, 'Cultural difference and cultural diversity', in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 206–9.

44 Tsolkias, 'Through clouds', p. 6,

45 Brian McFarlane 'Backtracking', *Meanjin*, vol. 62, no. 1 (2003), p. 68.

46 Corrigan, 'Genre, gender, and hysteria', p. 142.

We cannot assume to be able to read the texts in a 'national' sense: we read them as *white* (therefore limited) readers, remembering, as Judith Butler observes, that '[t]he visual field is not neutral to the question of race; it is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic and forceful'.[47] Sen's films cannot be roped unproblematically into a national narrative. Rather, his films inhabit but critique ('resemble but menace')[48] the road film, which as we have shown is imbricated with nation. His films also 'inhabit' but critique the national framing of cinema.

The 'Australianizing' of the road film occurs regardless of the possibility that 'roads' might not in fact mean the same thing to all of those who use them. This point is raised by Muecke and leads to a discussion of the different epistemologies of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Aware of the colonial history of the road, Muecke deploys a concept of the 'No Road' as its limit. This concept comes from Muecke's ficto-critical work *No Road: Bitumen all the Way*; he in turn borrowed the title from his friend Gloria. She told him the story of a local man from a community outside Darwin in the Northern Territory. She asked him whether there was a road out to his community and the man replied: 'Road? No road . . . NO ROAD. Bitumen all the way. Bitumen aaall the way.'[49] In this story the bitumen is not a road, the road is a track. What is a road to some is not a road to others; where one sees a track, others might see a road. These are quite different perceptions of place but articulated homonymically.

The relationship between road and track is not a neat opposition, not always surface and depth (the track *beneath* the road) but intertextual: one is built out of and into the body of the other, like a fold where cultures meet, at times violently. The presence of the road does not negate the track; it is indebted to it, it invokes it, it brings it into presence suggesting a coexistence of radically different ways of reading country and history. For instance, where white critics lament colonial history and violence (often relegated to the 'past'), Vaughn, the young Aboriginal man in *Beneath Clouds*, tells us, 'the war ain't fuckin' over'. That war is played out in the road space, and in the space of film criticism. Watching the road in Sen's films enables a spatial reading of these histories and discontinuities, while attempting to avoid the imperial histories of national cinemas.[50]

The continuing imbrication of road-spaces in histories of colonization is one clarified by Gibson.[51] Gibson recounts stories of the roads snaking through the area between Rockhampton and Mackay in Queensland. The space of the road becomes the site of peak intensity within that landscape; a site peopled with myriad deranged transients and victims caught by surprise, sleeping in their cars. The badland of the late twentieth century is where dark side-roads taper off into the bush from an old highway that is in notoriously bad condition. In Gibson's account, the white fears of the side of the road are rehearsed in the badland of contemporary and past memory.

47 Judith Butler, 'Endangered/endangering: schematic racism and white paranoia' (1993), in Sara Salih and Judith Butler (eds), *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 207.

48 Homi Bhabha, 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse', *October*, no. 28 (1984) p. 127.

49 Muecke, *No Road*, p. 18.

50 See Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 1988.

51 Gibson, *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*.

In popular culture the road bears a long tradition of figuring not only colonization itself, but also other social movements of white and black resistance. In 1965, the Freedom Riders set off from the University of Sydney to Moree and Walgett and other towns practising overt racial discrimination. In 2005 they set off again with a different group of students. This Freedom Ride owes a longer history to the romance of the road, its association with movement, freedom, mobility, taking to the streets, taking over the streets and leaving the streets behind. Roads are always contested postcolonial places, neither *entirely* resistant (Freedom Rides) nor *entirely* dominant ('bitumen all the way'), but both and more.

The road's relationship to colonization and postcoloniality is reflected in debate about the road movie genre's political potential – is it conservative or liberatory or both? In her reading of *Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992*)*, Katie Mills argues that the American road movie genre is a 'site of deviant discourse' that allows marginalized groups (such as queer communities in her reading) a 'territory of enunciation' or a 'shared "public" forum'.[52] Here Mills positions the genre as a 'forum' in which many different kinds of stories can be told. She sees potential for the genre *not* to be an 'archive of hegemony',[53] which reinscribes white hetero-masculine dominance, but to form a canon which is revitalized[54] by alternative filmmakers. According to Cohan and Hark, who are also positive in their reading of the productive inventiveness of the American road movie genre, *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) was one of a group of road movies in the 1990s – *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994), *Kalifornia* (Dominic Sena, 1993) and *Wild at Heart* (David Lynch, 1990) – which attempted to postmodernize the genre.[55] While it may be true that these films share the capacity to revitalize the genre, such an argument echoes the line of assimilation: difference is brought in to the genre to shore it up, rather than challenge its dominance. In a more critical reading of the genre, Sharon Willis reads road movies like *Boys on the Side* (Herbert Ross, 1995) and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (Beeban Kidron, 1995), as films which highlight the genre as a 'vehicle for mainstreaming',[56] taking the marginalized, that is, into Mills's 'public forum' and assimilating and erasing their differences.[57]

Laderman brings both elements of the road movie genre debate together, focusing again on American cinema and finding that the road movie genre is *both* conservative and liberatory. He argues that the road movie's 'generic core' is a 'tension between rebellion and conformity' such that 'the road movie's overt concern with rebellion against traditional social norms is consistently undermined, diluted or at least haunted by the very conservative cultural codes the genre so desperately takes flight from'.[58] In Laderman's account the road movie genre can do *both* things: express liberation for the marginalized, escape from the law, from family and from society, and also express the containment of the individual within; it is a circuitous route which makes the genre a profoundly ambivalent and troubled site. Here we read the road film

52 Katie Mills, 'Revitalising the road movie genre', in Cohan and Hark (eds), *The Road Movie Book*, p. 322.

53 Ibid, p. 323.

54 Ibid.

55 Cohan and Hark, *The Road Movie Book*, p. 14.

56 Sharon Willis, 'Race on the road: crossover dreams', in Cohan and Hark (eds), *The Road Movie Book*, p. 289.

57 Mills, 'Revitalising the road movie genre', p. 289.

58 Laderman, *Driving Visions*, p. 20.

largely in postcolonial terms and in that sense we take from the genre certain characteristics that Sen's films share with it.

Sen's first feature-length film, *Beneath Clouds* follows his short films in departing from the road film, while also occupying the same road space. In this film, which could be read as an expanded version of *Tears*, two young Aboriginal people (also named Vaughn and Lena) make their way on foot from rural New South Wales to the city of Sydney. Lena is leaving her country town while Vaughn has escaped from a juvenile detention centre. They are young and without material resources, and are forced to undertake the arduous journey on foot. Sen uses this zero-point of slowness to create a plane, stretching from the sheer drudgery of walking the highway through to a high-speed escape towards the end of the film, laying out points of intensity across it. They rarely get to choose when to slow down or speed up, instead taking opportunities as they arise and moving forward as best they can.

The film has similarities with the road film genre. In his landmark essay, 'Genre, gender, and hysteria: the road movie in outer space', Corrigan writes that the road movie usually displays a 'quest motif which propels the usually male characters along the road of discovery'.[59] Lena seeks her Irish father, available to her and the audience through artful black and white photos and postcards, contemplated in moments of reverie. Vaughn seeks his mother, who is dying, and escapes incarceration to do so. Both of these quests remain unfulfilled or aspirational, fulfilling another aspect of Corrigan's sense of the genre, that family units 'break apart, preserved only as a memory or desire with less and less substance'.[60] In *Beneath Clouds* this breaking apart takes place outside of the filmic frame, in the form of elaborated backstory. Memories of the familial for Lena and Vaughn are not positive, and this is revealed as the characters discuss their backgrounds throughout the film. Despite the saturation of domestic spaces with the threat of violence ('You show some respect girl, or I'll knock some into ya!') or with disease and death (Vaughn's mother's blood-stained sheets and oxygen tank) or rejection ('I don't fuckin' have any')*Beneath Clouds* nevertheless adopts the familial as central to the motivating forces that set its characters on the road. Both are heading towards lost or absent parents, but one of them, Lena, is searching out her white parent, an Irish father. Misrecognized by Vaughn as a whitefella, Lena replies: 'Is that right?'

The film is also outside of certain genre conventions in the way that the relationship between Lena and Vaughn develops. The characters do not begin or complete the film as 'buddies' as in certain Hollywood films, particularly outlaw films, or as a couple, as in many others. They only hesistatingly enter into the symbolic terrain of 'mateship', as the central characters in Philip Noyce's *Backroads* (1977) do. It would be difficult to assign a label to Lena and Vaughn's relationship: it is uncertain, argumentative and often close to breaking down, playing out racial conflict between whites and Aborigines. Lena provokes Vaughn along

59 Corrigan, 'Genre, gender, and hysteria', p. 144

60 Ibid., p. 145

conservative white lines. She argues with him about Aboriginal and white history, suggesting that Aborigines relinquished the land: 'Youse were the ones that gave it up'. Vaughn responds with: 'We didn't give it up, it was all them diseases and shit they brought in, that's what fucked us up'. Here the dispute over Aboriginal and white history echoes the arguments between Gary and Jack in *Backroads*. The scene between Lena and Vaughn also takes into consideration what has happened to whites in the process of colonization, that in fact it was they who 'lost' something:

> *Vaughn*: [looking at a picture of Lena's Irish father] He's fucking white alright. What's them stones for?
> *Lena*: They're special places.
> *Vaughn*: What?
> *Lena*: From a long time ago.
> *Vaughn*: Like sacred place?
> *Lena*: Sort of.
> *Vaughn*: What the fuck? Never heard of a white fella having no sacred site.
> *Lena*: Well they did a long time ago.
> *Vaughn*: Well what happened to em?
> *Lena*: Who?
> *Vaughn*: Them white fellas.
> *Lena*: I dunno, just changed I s'pose.
> *Vaughn*: How come you know all that shit?
> *Lena*: I read stuff, different books an' that.
> *Vaughn*: Yeah, well wouldn't believe everything you read. All written by whitefellas anyway.
> *Lena*: Not all whitefellas are the same.
> *Vaughn*: Don't make no difference where they come from . . . they're all fuckin' white and they all took our fuckin' land.

Lena's 'white' femininity in the film demonstrates her point that 'not all whitefellas are the same'. Her ambivalent claim to whiteness is articulated in terms of being different to Vaughn. She corrects him, she challenges him and she abuses him: 'You'll never win Vaughn. . . . You'll end up like the rest of them, just wasting your life away . . . you may as well give up now, Vaughn, you're just a fucking loser.' She refers to the countryside around them as 'this dump' while romanticizing the misty hills of Ireland. She is suspicious of Vaughn's friends who offer her a lift and reacts with contempt towards the Aboriginal man who hits his partner in the backseat: 'Stop the car, stop the fucking car. You're an arsehole do you know that?' Later, while Lena moves with ease in to the white public space of the bar, Vaughn is stared at suspiciously. Lena recognizes that no white people will offer Vaughn help and tells him as much. Lena's fair-skinned Aboriginality is articulated through rejection and correction of Vaughn, and results in her increased social mobility along the road.[61]

61 See Birch, 'Surveillance, identity and historical memory' for a different reading of the character's interactions in this scene.

Aboriginal mobility is contrasted with white mobility throughout the film. Interestingly, Vaughn defers to Lena's judgement when he is offered a ride by a white driver (Arthur Dignam) and Lena defers to Vaughn in order to access vehicles driven by Aborigines. White mobility is constructed throughout the film as synonymous with safety, speed and simplicity, but it is also threatening (the white men who attempt to abduct Lena) and fearful (the white lady who drives off when she sees Vaughn). Lena and Vaughn are granted access to privileged white mobility when they are offered a ride in the black Mercedes driven by the elderly white man. Here we see that whites traverse the road-space with an unthreatened comfort, immersed in a 'sound-bubble'. A police car overtakes silently and disappears, neutral and unthreatening here, when throughout the film they have always loomed up as a threat to Lena, Vaughn and other Aboriginal characters.

Near the beginning of the film, the vehicle that delivers Vaughn's sister (Tess) to him already shows a differential access and relation to the road-space for Aboriginal people. As with the cotton chipper's vehicle – which is deemed not to be road-worthy by the police officer ('If I see you driving this piece of shit again I'll fine your arse') – this vehicle embodies a tenuous and fraught relationship to the road-space. Aboriginal characters inhabit vehicles in *Beneath Clouds* that are under heavy surveillance ('Black Beauty', the cotton chipper's car), are used without the driver's knowledge (Vaughn's milk truck) or are made available through gestures of white philanthropy (the country gentleman's black Mercedes). Often access is imaginary (as with Vaughn's WRX), illegal (Vaughn was in prison for car theft) and more often denied (as with the white woman who drives away upon seeing Vaughn). In most cases, access to vehicular transport involves innovative action in difficult circumstances: it is never a relationship of speed and simplicity as embodied in commercialized car culture. Yet this resistant practice is infused with the very primacy of that dominant conception.

Corrigan points out that in the road movie 'the camera adopts the framed perspective of the vehicle itself'.[62] Given that much of the film concentrates on the movement of these characters on foot, this perspective does not apply in relation to *Beneath Clouds*. Also, at one of the few moments in the film in which the perspective of a vehicle ('Black Beauty') is shown, it is simultaneous with the arrival of a police car that is about to bring that vehicle to a halt and initiate a confrontation. Where it is adopted, this framed perspective proves to be fleeting and thwarted.

62 Corrigan, 'Genre, gender, and hysteria', p. 146.

It is in its relationship to speed that there is a primary difference between *Beneath Clouds* and other films that more clearly belong to the road movie genre. There is a cult of speed-freedom in the road movie, something which David Lynch has addressed in *The Straight Story* (1999), in which he slows his protagonist down by granting him a lawnmower to travel on instead of a stylish set of wheels. *Beneath Clouds* does not, as road films tend to, emphasize an equation of speed and freedom, an equation in which the second term (freedom) is in fact

negated in the first (speed). Instead of speed, *Beneath Clouds* offers a drastic slowing down, which is akin to an *inscription*. As in his earlier films, this feature film requires that characters be brought to a halt, slowed down. This film is more like a machine that writes something onto the body of the road, and it does so in fits and starts – at the pace of the hitchhiker, not that of the road warrior or the speed freak.

The climax of the film is reached on the road. What takes place is a confrontation between Vaughn, the occupants of 'Black Beauty' and two policemen. The tone of the film changes and we can assume that, from the film's perspective, the immediate seeds of this confrontation are sown the moment that Lena and Vaughn enter the vehicle. The presence of the firearm (real or not), the loud hip-hop music, and the use of particular phrases ('Nigga please!') has already associated Vaughn's milieu with a 'gangsta' subcultural practice. The car is called Black Beauty, written in large letters on the rear windshield, a phrase which unites the car both with the horse (an earlier road model) and with the black consciousness movement's promotion of black pride and black beauty. The joke is that the South African government in the 1960s listed *Black Beauty* – the book about the horse – as a banned item because of that particular association. While there is a comic incongruity in the fact that the trio of would-be gangstas are returning from a fishing trip, the characters' engagement with particular forms of Aboriginal masculinity appears filled with a foreboding even before the arrival of the police. It is a discomfort that a white audience might share with Lena here, but the context is also one in which Vaughn is trying to avoid apprehension and taking the ride seems eminently risky. Aboriginal masculinity figures here, as it does elsewhere in the film, as threatening to Lena, which is not to say that white masculinity is not also threatening (for instance, in the potential kidnapping scene). The 'threat' that these men pose is one of assertive, black power, invoked partly by the rhetoric of African-American culture – 'Nigga please', the gun and the car.

Collins and Davis refer to 'a certain macho suicidal tendency that historically characterizes stories of Aboriginal resistance'.[63] Lena might agree with this reading: 'I know you always got a choice'. The elderly woman in the back seat does not appear too bothered or threatened by the 'gangstas'. Indeed, her story of Gin's Leap (the story of the massacre on the rock as the car passes it) evokes a different kind of threat that is historically linked to colonial violence (genocidal rather than suicidal). While Aboriginal masculinity may be perceived as a threat to whites (and Lena), a history of massacre, as well as the next scene's confrontation with white police, contextualizes this threat as linked to whiteness. After all, these 'gangstas' have been out fishing; it is white police in the next scene who threaten them with incarceration, arrest and a beating.

From the quiet look that the elderly woman has at the massacre rock looming above, through her questioning of Lena about her heritage ('Where are your people from?'), to the gun talk and violence, the film seems to be pushing the characters towards a logic of finite social and

63 Collins and Davis, *Australian Cinema After Mabo*, p. 168.

historical realities and identities, but at the same time it is looking outwards towards the sky, the land, the road. Indeed the juxtaposition of the images of the rock with those of the power station and power lines evokes a link between a colonial history of dispossession and modernity. A terrain of conflict and modern state-power is being woven together as the car moves forward. The massacre rock is also a site of haunting, and the elderly woman's questions may appear to coincide with a suppressed knowledge. The audience is offered few diegetic clues to explain why she asks Lena that question ('Where are your people from?') at that moment. It links Lena with a history of dispossession and violence and, as Collins and Davis observe, it asks Lena to identify either with those who committed the massacre (the whites) or those who survived it. What this scene also invokes is a point of white critique for the audience. Whites who may have (mis)identified with Lena's 'white' femininity are here invited to recognize their complicity in this history: the film has shown us where Lena's people are from, but do whites know where *our* people are from?

This all happens at a point when Lena and Vaughn are making progress with the most forward motion yet: this is an apparent contradiction of the road-space being evoked, that speed should be wrapped in surveillance. All of the indeterminate and determinate elements of the events leading up to the confrontation are bound up in a single speeding vehicle that is conspicuous before the gaze of the state, and promptly comes into conflict with it.

After being pulled over, Vaughn is asked to step out of the vehicle by one of the officers. Vaughn refuses to give a name, and following an altercation the officer violently assaults and begins beating Vaughn. Lena, in stepping out of the car and picking up the baton, is restating the indeterminacy of the situation. While there is a lack of dialogue characteristic of Sen, it seems that Lena feels she has to do *something*. That something is also immediately practical: she draws the attention of the officer from Vaughn at an opportune moment for them all. Indeed she succeeds in being both blameless and successful in preventing the apprehension of Vaughn and the others, offering them an escape route. The reprieve is short, but allows Vaughn to reach his mother's house, where he finds only an empty blood-soaked bed. In the final sequence, Vaughn's apprehension appears inevitable. Indeed, as he leaves his mother's house, police cars arrive on the scene. Vaughn faces them, a tenuous pedestrian figure in the middle of the road, and is able to say goodbye to Lena at the train station.

The road is the place in which the film is played out, with interludes that occur off the road but always *in relation to* the road. *Beneath Clouds*, like *Tears*, *Vanish* and *Dust*, does not declare an outside ('freedom' at the end of the road). Rather the film's engagement with the road combats its logic from within, slowing down and occupying it differently. The film opens with a sequence of time-lapse shots of clouds cut through with electricity transmission towers. This imagery sets up a persistent tension

between the materiality of static networks (like colonialism) and the dynamic space of the cloud-filled sky, but the churning cloud-mass is not so much representative of transcendence for the characters as of an indeterminacy between film and the road-space which cannot be easily reconciled. As Carter reminds us: '[e]veryone saw the clouds. But the meaning of these events, the historical significance of their spatial appearance was another matter'.[64] *Beneath Clouds* points to this indeterminate space between viewers and the viewed, scene and the seen.

64 Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, p. 338.

British cinema institutions Introduction

The opening and closing plenaries at the 2005 *Screen* conference were devoted to cinema institutions, an aspect of cinema regularly in the background of research but rarely foregrounded as it should be. The conference opened with presentations by Christophe Dupin and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith of Queen Mary, University of London, based on their AHRC-funded research into the history of the British Film Institute (BFI) from 1933 to near the present day; and it closed with presentations by Julia Knight and Peter Thomas – then at the University of Luton, now at Sunderland – on their work (also AHRC-funded) on independent film distribution in Britain since the foundation of the London Film-makers' Co-op (LFMC) in 1966.

The BFI has been at the centre of film culture in Britain since 1950, if not earlier. Indeed the very phrase 'film culture' seems to have originated in the BFI's Education Department around 1970. No aspect of cinema in Britain has been unaffected: preservation and access, exhibition, distribution, production, education, information and documentation, and research. There was, however, one significant absence from the BFI's remit. Founded to 'encourage the art of film', it concerned itself very little with what came to be known as 'artists' film' – that is to say film produced non-industrially in a modern art framework. Support for this work became the province of the Arts Council, though there were inevitably border disputes with the BFI, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, when each organization was seeking to expand its own area of operations. The history of British film culture is in part the result of the interplay between various 'quangos' (quasi-autonomous non-government organizations), and between the quangos on the one side and independent or commercial organizations on the other.

The papers at the two plenaries were all case studies, designed to throw light on a particular aspect of this little-understood area of institutional

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history. Those on the BFI concerned themselves with moments of crisis and change in the organization, first around 1950 and then again around 1970, while those on the artists' organizations examined the effect of funder-sponsorship on the development of an artists' film and video culture in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s.

As Christophe Dupin shows in his paper, the BFI was effectively re-founded in or around 1950, and by stages turned itself from a sleepy organization with a vaguely educational remit into a very visible presence on the national film scene, with a large membership attracted into its orbit by a revamped *Sight and Sound* and by the newly opened National Film Theatre in London, followed in the 1960s by Regional Film Theatres elsewhere in the country. However, as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues, this much expanded BFI proved unwieldy and unable to respond to the pressures of the radicalized post-1968 culture. It entered a severe crisis in 1970, from which – ironically – it was rescued in part by the efforts of the same man who had led the reforms of 1950: Denis Forman. The resurgent BFI of the 1970s and 1980s then successfully absorbed many of the criticisms made during the crisis and was able to assume a leading role in what was by now the 'film culture'.

Peter Thomas and Julia Knight change tack and take the view from below – or at least outside – the quangos. Thomas argues that the success of the self-starter, volunteer London Film-makers' Co-op in event-management, audience-building and cultural advocacy from 1966 led to a situation in 1978 where it had made itself largely redundant. As the Arts Council began to provide event-management and audience-building directly to the LFMC's artist-filmmaker membership, the LFMC risked being reduced to a cheap means of making funded films. Knight continues the story of this competition between artists' organizations and funders' direct provision by examining the conflict between the Arts Council-founded and BFI-supported Film and Video Umbrella and the LFMC and London Video Arts.

The articles which follow are abbreviated and revised versions of the papers given at the Conference.

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Peter Thomas

The postwar transformation of the British Film Institute and its impact on the development of a national film culture in Britain

CHRISTOPHE DUPIN

Among the few studies available on the early history of the British Film Institute (BFI), the Radcliffe Report (1948) is generally acknowledged as the first, and perhaps the most important, turning point in the BFI's history in that it signalled the rebirth of the Institute in a modernized form that still, nearly sixty years later, provides the template for the BFI's activities.[1] This essay first looks at the circumstances of the BFI's creation in the early 1930s to try to explain the failure of its 'first life' (1933–1948); it then examines the process of its postwar transformation (of which the Radcliffe report was only the most 'public' stage); and, finally, it explores the early work of the new regime and its long-lasting impact on the development of a film culture in Britain.

In the late 1920s a number of educational, scientific and religious organizations began to recognize that film, beyond its purely entertainment value, was 'a powerful instrument for good and evil in national life' (the expression was in vogue in those circles).[2] It is in this context that a group of educationists from the British Institute of Adult Education launched, in November 1929, an active campaign to encourage the use of film as a visual aid in formal education as well as to raise the general standard of film appreciation among the public. They set up an independent (and, to their great disappointment, unofficial) Commission on Educational and Cultural Films to find ways of achieving these aims, for instance through the establishment of a 'permanent

1 Cyril J. Radcliffe, *Report of the Committee on the British Film Institute: Presented by the Lord President of the Council to Parliament by Command of His Majesty* (London: HMSO, 1948).

2 Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, *The Film in National Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), p. A.

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central organization'.[3] Its comprehensive report, *The Film in National Life* (1932), indeed recommended the creation of a national film institute funded by public money and incorporated under Royal Charter. By that time, however, the ever philistine British film trade had become aware of the Commission's activities and its representatives immediately showed their hostility towards a project which in their view could interfere with their short-term commercial interests. The trade associations demanded to be included in the negotiations on the future film institute, and from then on their representatives ensured that it would remain an innocuous body with as little influence as possible on the development of commercial cinema.

The situation was made worse by the fact that the government, beyond its usual lack of interest in the cultural possibilities of film, was then confronted by a severe economic depression, and therefore rejected both the financial arrangements and the Royal Charter advocated by *The Film in National Life*. As a compromise, it was decided in Parliament that a small proportion of the profits from the Sunday opening of cinemas should be redistributed, via a Fund administered by the Privy Council, to organizations contributing to 'the development of the film as a means of entertainment and instruction', with the proposed Institute firmly in mind but without naming it.[4] This financial arrangement quickly proved far from ideal. Not only was the grant it received ridiculously small (less than £8000 on average in its first ten years), but it had to be renegotiated with the Privy Council every year. Another essential drawback of this financial setup was the fact that it allowed the trade to claim its stake in the control of the BFI on the grounds that it would be funded from a tax on cinema receipts. By the time the Institute was officially founded in September 1933, it had already become an unofficial, semi-private (it was registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee), underfunded organization, run jointly – or rather competitively – by the trade and the educationists, through their nominated representatives on the Governing Body.[5] While the trade strictly prevented the Institute from interfering with commercial cinema, the educationists imposed upon it their narrow-minded view of film.

As a result, the bulk of the BFI's work in the first fifteen years of its existence was concerned with the promotion of film as a modern means of instruction. It did this through the publication of numerous leaflets on school projectors; through lists of teaching films; through its two in-house magazines, *Sight and Sound* and the *Monthly Film Bulletin*; through the organization of lectures, conferences and summer schools for teachers around the country; and, finally, through its constant lobbying of the Board of Education, Local Education Authorities and Teachers Associations. At the same time, the Institute was somewhat removed from the early manifestations of a British film culture which had been emerging in Britain since the late 1920s (in particular through the work of the Film Society, the journals *Close-up* and *Film Art*, and the state-funded documentary film movement led by John Grierson). If the

3 Ibid.

4 This was the BFI's general brief. From *The British Film Institute: First Annual Report, Year ended 30 September 1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1934), p. 8.

5 The Board of Governors consisted of three representatives of the educational sector, three representatives of the trade, and three representatives of the 'general public'.

BFI failed to recognize the importance of these cultural practices, in return it was largely excluded from them.

The outbreak of World War II did not help to improve the status or effectiveness of the organization. Most of its already limited staff (nineteen in 1939) were mobilized, and its headquarters were heavily bombed during the Blitz. The newly formed Ministry of Information also made sure that the Institute would be totally excluded from the government's film propaganda, after several of the Ministry of Information's officers severely criticized its conservatism and incompetence.[6] In the war years, the BFI seemed to retreat even more into its strictly educational brief, which it saw as its vital contribution to the national effort. A clear indication of this evolution was the resignation, in June 1945, of the Institute's Secretary Olwen Vaughan, who had been one of the only staff members with a genuine interest in film as an art form, after 'it had become evident to her that the British Film Institute would become increasingly concerned with educational films and visual education in the period of reconstruction'.[7]

Even before the war ended, the Institute had become such a marginal organization that the very justification for its existence began to be publicly questioned. The first serious attack on the BFI was formulated by the Dartington Hall Trust. During the war, this independent body carried out a comprehensive Arts Enquiry which severely criticized the BFI's limited achievements and lack of influence, in particular in the field of formal education, which had been its main activity.[8] Beside the BFI's constitutional and financial weaknesses, the survey put the blame on its inadequate staff and chronic lack of initiative. In the first draft of its report, circulated confidentially in 1944, the Enquiry went so far as to conclude:

> An organization is required to replace the British Film Institute, which will have a more workable constitution, wider terms of reference and more adequate facilities. Because of past history, we regard it as essential that this should be a new organization with a new name.[9]

When the Report was published two years later under the title of *The Factual Film*, its conclusions were somehow more positive.[10] The Enquiry recognized the need for a national film institute, but with a reformed constitution which would guarantee its independence from interest groups, a permanent and adequate financial basis, and a complete redefinition of its brief towards the promotion of film as an art form. Although the Government did not officially endorse the Arts Enquiry's conclusions, the document was circulated among the government representatives who debated the future of the BFI, and it formed the basis for their discussions in three crucial inter-ministerial meetings between January 1946 and January 1947.[11]

These meetings were initially triggered not only by the need for the government to rethink its film policy from scratch following the Ministry of Information's replacement by the Central Office of Information, but

6 James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939–1945* (London: IB Tauris, 1997), pp. 26–36.

7 Quoted in the Minutes of the BFI's Board of Governors, 7 June 1945.

8 The BFI's full membership stagnated at around 1000 during the war, while only 18% of all Local Education Authorities were corporate members of the BFI in 1943.

9 Arts Enquiry, 'Interim draft of the factual film in Great Britain' [unpublished confidential document (October 1944), p. IV].

10 Arts Enquiry, *The Factual Film: a Survey Sponsored by the Dartington Hall Trustees* (London: Oxford University Press for PEP, January 1947).

11 For the notes of these three meetings and the related government papers, see the National Archives, File CAB 130/9.

also by the fact that the Local Education Authorities and the teachers' associations, obviously unhappy with the BFI's progress on visual education, had set up (with the Ministry of Education's approval) the National Committee for Visual Aids in Education, a new body which took over the Institute's educational duties in 1946. With this in mind, the civil servants present at these meetings initially doubted seriously whether there was a need for a film institute at all.[12] Yet by their third meeting, they had come to the conclusion that there was no case for abolishing the BFI. Instead, they suggested that the BFI refocus its activities on the development of public appreciation of film as an *art form* (the concept was still very new, especially in government circles), through the maintenance of the National Film Library, film criticism, a network of film societies, the compilation of a critical catalogue of films and the collection of information about film. As for financial arrangements, they did not rule out an increased grant from the Exchequer, but they concluded that any such change would require an 'authoritative public investigation' of the work of the BFI.

The decision to give the BFI a second chance despite its main responsibility having been transferred to another body can be explained by the Government's recognition (to some extent) of the cultural, artistic and historical value of film after the war, and by the fact that the BFI itself had, albeit on a very limited scale, started encouraging the increased interest in film appreciation from the late 1930s (the term was first used by the BFI in its 1938 report), via film criticism published in the pages of *Sight and Sound* and the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, as well as through conferences and pamphlets designed for the training of teachers.[13] Its main achievement was the setting up of the National Film Library (later known as the National Film Archive) in 1935. Although its initial remit was partly educational and its resources greatly inadequate, by the early 1940s it had turned its full attention to the preservation and distribution of films illustrating the history of cinema as an art. Largely due to the dedication and professionalism of its founder and curator Ernest Lindgren, the growth of its collections and more generally its film appreciation work helped the BFI to maintain a certain level of credibility and was successful in convincing the government of its worth in the field of 'cultural cinema'. Towards the end of the war, film appreciation was progressively endorsed by the Institute as a whole. It played a crucial role in the postwar development of film societies by initiating the English and Welsh Federations of Film Societies and by setting up the Central Booking Agency. It organized its first summer school on film appreciation in 1944 (an annual feature in the BFI's calendar until the 1990s). In April 1945, film historian Roger Manvell was appointed lecturer, and in that year alone he and other members of staff delivered over a hundred lectures around the country. A year later, the Institute introduced for the first time the idea of a 'national cinema repertory theatre' which would provide a centre for film appreciation in Britain.[14]

12 The Government departments represented in these meetings were those with an interest in film, that is, the Ministry of Education, the Home Office, the Board of Trade, the Treasury and the Privy Council as the authority responsible for the BFI.

13 On *Sight and Sound*'s early contribution to the development of a film culture in Britain, see Melanie Selfe, 'Encouraging a national film culture: the changing role of *Sight and Sound*, 1935–1945' (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2003).

14 Patrick Gordon-Walker, 'The future of the British Film Institute' (memorandum to the Treasury, 7 October 1946, National Archives, File CAB 130/9).

The setting-up of the Committee of Enquiry into the Future Constitution and Work of the Institute (Radcliffe Committee) by the Lord President of the Council, Herbert Morrison, in November 1947, answered the demands of the inter-ministerial group. Its conclusions, published in April 1948, amalgamated the recommendations of the Arts Enquiry and the governmental meetings. They also acknowledged the significance of the work done of late by the BFI on film appreciation. The Institute was confirmed in its new brief to 'encourage the development of the art of film and foster public appreciation and study of it', through the administration of the NFL, a first-class information service and various film appreciation activities. Among these, it recommended the possible creation of a 'specially-built cinema . . . for the showing of films to audiences of, say, 300 to 400 people', putting the project of a national repertory cinema back on the agenda.[15] In contrast to the conclusions of the inter-ministerial meeting of January 1947, the Radcliffe Report strongly recommended the development of regional BFI offices in order to spread its influence in the regions. In terms of the BFI's constitution, the Report insisted that the Governors should be appointed directly by the government rather than by specific interest groups. It also once again recommended a direct grant from the Exchequer as its main source of finance.

Within fourteen months of the publication of the Report, all the constitutional and financial recommendations were implemented. The mode of appointment of the Governors was changed, the Memorandum and Articles of Association were revised to incorporate the new brief and the allocation of a Treasury grant was voted in Parliament, even though it was far from reaching the amount recommended in the Report and expected by the BFI to support its expansion plans for the 1950s.[16]

Another crucial aspect of the BFI's transformation was the renewal of a significant proportion of its staff. Cecil King, the new Chairman, found in the BFI an organization undermined by corruption and inefficiency. Its two top executives, the Director Oliver Bell and the Secretary R.W. Dickinson, were held responsible for the situation, and they were replaced by two bright young civil servants: Denis Forman (former chief production officer at the Central Office of Information) as Director and R.S. Camplin as Secretary.[17]

Once appointed, the new Director made the necessary adjustments to the staff according to the past successes and failures of the Institute, while also taking into account its new focus on film appreciation. Even more importantly, he brought in a new generation of film enthusiasts who were to lead the way towards a more modern approach to the film medium. With their support, Forman elaborated between the summers of 1949 and 1950 the embryo of an integral and nationwide strategy towards the development of a film culture in Britain, either by reorganizing or creating from scratch a number of film-related activities including preservation, distribution, exhibition, film criticism and film education (still referred to as film appreciation).

15 *Report of the Committee on the British Film Institute.*

16 Although the Radcliffe Report recommended an annual BFI budget of at least £100 000, the Institute would not reach this figure until 1957.

17 It is not unlikely that there were political motives behind the reshuffle, as Cecil King was known to be close to the Labour party, while Bell was a former member of the Conservative Party Central Office and there had been allegations that Dickinson was linked with British fascists.

The first of these activities to be modernized was *Sight and Sound*. After taking on board ex-*Sequence* contributors Gavin Lambert and Penelope Houston, the magazine quickly became a reference in film criticism, attracting articles not only by critics but also by leading filmmakers. Between 1950 and 1959, the magazine managed to treble its readership from 5500 to 15,000. As for the BFI's other magazine, the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, it abandoned its reviewing of educational films to make space for the feature films of the month. It also dramatically raised its standard of film criticism.

Forman's second task was the strengthening of the distribution arm of the National Film Library by appointing the BFI's first distribution officer, with the objective of making more films of all kinds available to film societies and other specialized user groups. As it became clear that the projected National Film Theatre was unlikely to materialize immediately, BFI officers decided not to wait any longer. They organized a comprehensive, forty-one-week cycle of repertory programmes of films from the National Film Library for students of film. The programmes were screened at the Institut Français and various London venues in 1950/51. This first season was such a success that it was repeated the following year.

Another task was the modernization of the services provided to the rapidly expanding Film Society movement. The BFI officers understood the key role these local groups of film enthusiasts played in spreading the idea of film as an art form through their screenings of classic or foreign films to local communities around the country. Although the Central Booking Agency had been in place since 1945, the services it provided were dramatically improved and rationalized under Forman, in order to respond to the growing demand. By negotiating the film bookings with commercial distributors on behalf of the societies, and by providing programme notes and other literature to accompany the screenings, the BFI managed to exert a certain control over this key development.

Another cornerstone of Forman's strategy was the development of film education. In 1950 he appointed a teacher, Stanley Reed, as the BFI's first full-time film appreciation officer. This new activity followed two complementary directions: the training of teachers and youth leaders in film appreciation work through numerous lectures (as many as 239 in 1952) and courses up and down the country (not to mention the now established annual summer school), and through the preparation of suitable teaching materials, including film extracts, leaflets, catalogues and a new monthly publication entitled *Film Guide*.

By the end of 1951, the first phase of Forman's holistic project was completed. Two further areas, which appeared as natural extensions of his strategy, were yet to be organized: the BFI's own permanent cinema, and the support of experimental film production at a time when film experiment was practically non-existent both within and without the film industry. If the BFI's Treasury grant had not allowed it to expand into these two areas, the 1951 Festival of Britain was to give it the opportunity to do so.

Shortly after the publication of the Radcliffe Report, Herbert Morrison had given the BFI the task of organizing the film activities of the Festival of Britain as part of its new prerogative. This decision led to two developments. First, the Institute was asked to build a small state-of-the-art cinema, named Telecinema, to be included in London's South Bank Exhibition. Secondly, it was given a token sum of money to sponsor a handful of short experimental (mainly stereoscopic) films, to be shown in the Telecinema.[18] The success of the cinema and its experimental programmes over the summer of 1951 (it attracted nearly 500,000 spectators) was such that Forman, with Morrison's support, started campaigning to retain the Telecinema as a permanent venue. However, things were made more difficult by the Conservative election victory in October 1951 as the new government saw both the Festival and the BFI as symbols of the Labour era. The money to fund the Institute's future cinema had to be found elsewhere and Forman, pragmatic as ever, found an unlikely ally in the film trade. After lengthy negotiations, he obtained enough money from the Eady Levy (a mere £25,000) not only to turn the Telecinema into the National Film Theatre, but also to set up a small Experimental Film Fund which would go on to fund a number of 'Free Cinema' films in the mid-1950s and would be revived as the Production Board a decade later. Despite being a minor activity (and not one envisaged by the Racliffe Report), film production proved to be a crucial piece in the puzzle, in that it conferred on the BFI a new dynamic attitude towards film at a time when most of its activities were turned to film in its historical dimension.

The NFT was also a crucial feature in Forman's cultural project in that it supported the growth of a new generation of film enthusiasts through its two-fold policy of repertory screenings illustrating the history of film as an art form, and screenings of current foreign films which Londoners had never seen before, not to mention screenings of the BFI's own experimental productions. Thanks to the new associate membership created to accommodate NFT-goers, the total BFI membership increased dramatically from about 2500 in 1952 to over 40,000 by the end of the decade (see figure 2).

Throughout the 1950s, the BFI's growing influence also manifested itself through its new role as a forum for the British film intelligentsia. Writers, critics and filmmakers (from Kenneth Tynan to Dilys Powell and Lindsay Anderson) met at the BFI and made a regular contribution to the BFI's project by writing articles, reviewing films, giving lectures or programming film seasons at the NFT.

By 1952/53, the cultural model designed by Denis Forman and his colleagues was in place (see figure 1 for its administrative structure). It would not be fundamentally challenged until the late 1960s. What James Quinn and Stanley Reed, Forman's successors, did was to consolidate and expand this model: the former by setting up the NFT on its present site and launching the London Film Festival in 1957; the latter by taking the BFI's brief and methods out of the metropolis and into the regions

18 The BFI was initially entrusted with a budget of £120,000 to commission a series of documentaries. Following the Festival budget cuts in 1949, the BFI was able to salvage a mere £11,000 out of the initial sum towards the production of a handful of experimental shorts.

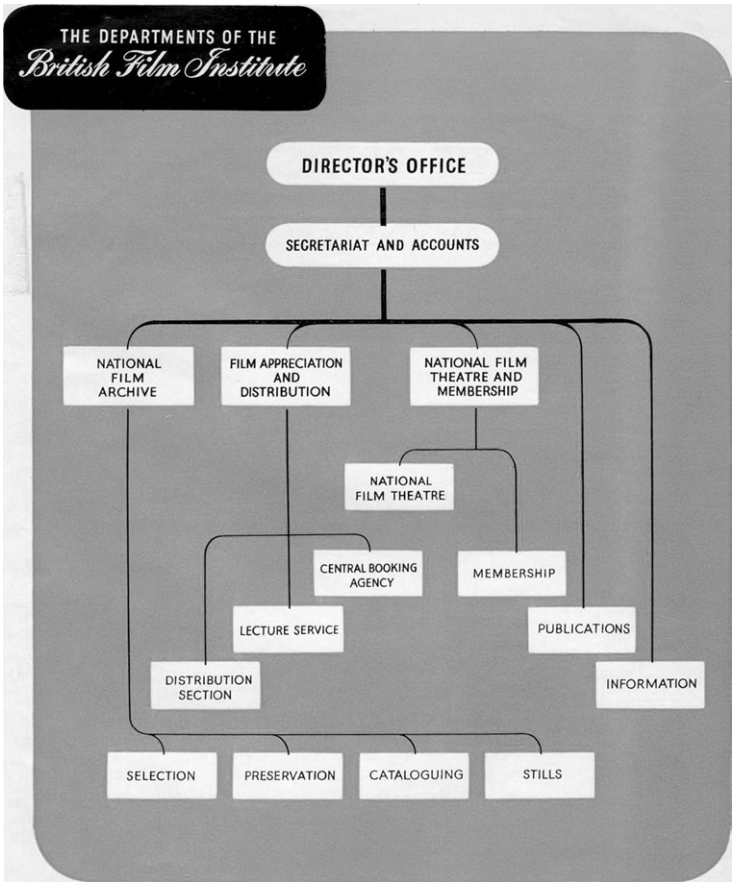

Fig. 1
The Departments of the BFI, 1954.

through the establishment of a network of Regional Film Theatres. This expansive cultural policy was not, however, implemented as easily as it may sound. The BFI's two usual obstacles were its recurrent financial difficulties, caused by the stagnation of grant-in-aid until Jennie Lee's appointment as Arts Minister in 1965 (see figure 3), and the

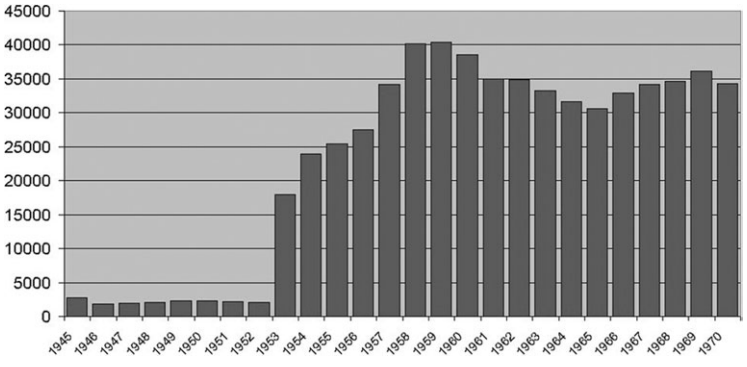

Fig. 2
BFI membership numbers.

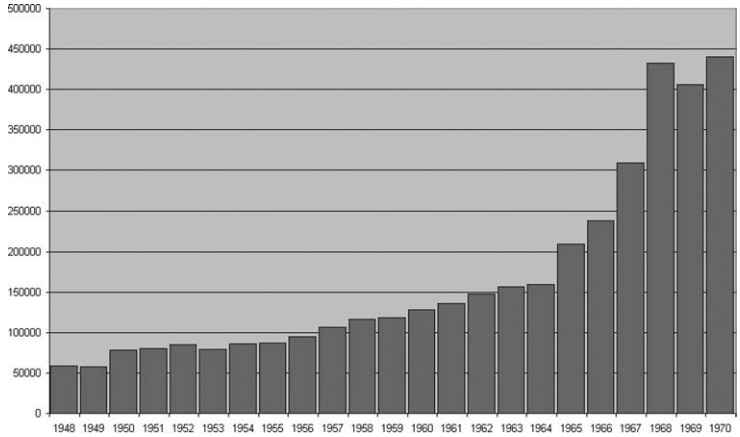

Fig. 3
BFI annual budgets.

ever-unhelpful attitude of the trade, which, despite the BFI's constitutional changes, still managed to have a number of influential representatives on its governing body.

By the late 1960s, the postwar model was in a serious existential crisis. A new generation of film enthusiasts, critics and filmmakers started publicly questioning the BFI's apathy and its hegemony over film culture in Britain (it was even nicknamed the 'Rank organization of 16 mm').[19] Indeed, what was considered modern in the late 1940s had become conservative in post-1968 Britain. The generation of cinephiles who had taken part in the BFI's revolution of the late 1940s to early 1950s – Stanley Reed, John Huntley, Penelope Houston, Leslie Hardcastle, even Ernest Lindgren – were still in post in 1970. By then they had become a symbol of the film culture establishment, and *their* idea of a film culture was considered out-of-date by many. Little wonder there was a crisis looming.

19 'BFI Report: Confidential', in *Oz*, no. 15 (1968).

The 1970 crisis at the BFI and its aftermath

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

Around 1970 the British Film Institute (BFI) was engulfed by crisis at every level. There were tensions within the Board of Governors, between governors and management, within the management, and between management and staff and among different staff factions. Outside, a group of BFI members was agitating vociferously for change and threatening, if necessary, to have the entire Board of Governors dismissed from office. Meanwhile Whitehall dithered anxiously, hoping that some vigorous inaction would save the Minister from the embarrassment of having to intervene.

In the end the crisis was defused. The governors were not dismissed. The Minister discreetly accepted the resignation of the Chairman of the Board. Equally discreetly, the Director took early retirement due to ill health. Although a little blood had been spilt – notably in the form of the resignation of the charismatic head of the BFI's Education Department, Paddy Whannel – by early 1972 order had been restored. This was not, however, a victory for the forces of conservatism, since the BFI which emerged from the crisis was in fact profoundly changed, and in many respects in a progressive direction.

Memory of the crisis is still alive in the minds of the surviving participants, but it has left little trace in the public record. The only history of the BFI, Ivan Butler's *To Encourage the Art of Film*, deals in a cursory and complacent manner with the dramatic Annual General Meeting in December 1970 at which the governors narrowly escaped dismissal, but says nothing about why the crisis erupted in the first place, or of its aftermath.[1] The autumn 1971 issue of *Screen* gives the point of view of Whannel and his colleagues who resigned alongside

1 Ivan Butler, *'To Encourage the Art of Film': the Story of the British Film Institute* (London: Robert Hale, 1971), pp. 49–53. The book was published too soon after the events to deal with their aftermath, and since Butler there has been no book-length study of the BFI.

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him.[2] The correspondence columns of *The Listener* (outlet of choice for the establishment faction) and *Time Out* (for the rebels) contain some spirited polemic for historians to pore over, but for the most part the material about the crisis lies, more or less undisturbed, in the BFI's Paper Archive, largely in the boxes where the BFI's own records are lodged, but also in Sir Michael Balcon's papers in BFI Special Collections.[3]

What was the crisis about, and what caused it? Very crudely, it came about because the BFI as recreated under Denis Forman after the Radcliffe Report (see Dupin, in this issue) had grown, but had not kept up with changes in the surrounding culture. From 1965 onwards it had benefited from large increases in government funding: the National Film Archive was getting new vaults to house the greater number of films it was able to preserve; the National Film Theatre was about to open its second screen, NFT 2, for specialist programmes; the Experimental Film Fund had become the Production Board, with a budget that made possible the financing of feature-length films; and an ambitious programme was underway to open Regional Film Theatres (RFTs) across the country, from Newcastle in the north-east to Newport in south Wales. However, as to what culture these activities should promote and how they could be concerted to good effect, there were few in the Institute with much of a clue.

The source of the expansion was the Labour government elected in 1964. One of its first acts had been to appoint a Minister for the Arts in the form of Jennie Lee, widow of the leader of the Labour left in the 1950s, Aneurin Bevan. Lee's mission was to bring art to the people and she eagerly threw money at the BFI to activate its embryonic plans for the RFTs. Whether her idea for the RFTs was that they would show art films or films about art was never clear, but the BFI was happy to lap up the money without asking too many questions.[4] The BFI's government grant for recurrent expenditure rose from £126,000 in 1964/65, to £180,000 in 1965/66, £230,000 in 1966/67, £280,000 in 1967/68 and £345,000 in 1968/69, a sizeable proportion of the increase being for regional activity. It also received substantial capital grant: some for the Archive, but mainly for the regions. Meanwhile its self-generated income also rose, but more slowly. Overall, the Institute's total turnover rose from £250,000 in 1964/65, which was 50% government grant and 50% self-generated income, to £650,000 in 1969/70, of which two-thirds was grant and one-third self-generated.[5] Meanwhile over the same period staff numbers rose from just over 100 in 1964 to nearly 200 in 1969, topping the 200 mark in 1970. One way or another, the organization had more than doubled in size in six years and had also become much more heavily dependent on government.

Meanwhile, however, it had neither adjusted its governance nor its management to take account of the greater range of its activities, nor had it responded (other than negatively) to changes in the surrounding culture. It was managed by a Director (Stanley Reed) and a small and

2 *Screen*, vol. 12, no 3 (1971). See also Colin McArthur 'Two steps forward, one step back: cultural struggle in the British Film Institute', *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, no. 4 (2001), pp. 112–27 .

3 The relevant boxes in the BFI Paper Archive are 19, 51 and 71. From the Balcon Collection, K/48.

4 Lee's confusion sounds implausible, but is attested by surviving witnesses of her meeting with BFI staff after her appointment.

5 Source, *BFI Annual Reports*.

rather clubby Executive Committee, responsible to a Board of non-executive governors drawn in large part from the film trade, who had neither the time nor the inclination to provide detailed oversight of BFI affairs, which were increasingly complex. Management style had become inappropriate to the enlarged scale of operations. Newly created tiers of middle and junior management felt themselves cut out of the decision-making process and were angry when decisions taken turned out to be ill-informed. Most important, the management was unaware – or, when aware, foolishly dismissive – of what was happening at the grass roots among BFI members and other people active in the film culture. The activists were only a minority, but if there was ever a time when it was foolish to dismiss the views of the active minorities – the *minorités agissantes* – the years around 1968 were it.

After four years of uncontested and self-satisfied expansion, the alarm bells began to ring in 1968. In June, without giving any notice of his intentions, a young filmmaker called Maurice Hatton published in *The Times* an Open Letter to the Minister lambasting the BFI for squandering its resources and calling for it to be abolished and replaced by a new, more active body for which Hatton proposed the name 'Cinetec International London'. Jennie Lee was not amused and issued a curt rejoinder to the press expressing her regret at Hatton's abuse of protocol and her confidence in the BFI's governance and management.

Over the next eighteen months dissatisfaction began to grow among the minorities and soon coalesced into an active movement of dissent. The BFI Annual General Meeting in December 1969 was well attended, bad tempered, and by all accounts badly handled by management and by the Chairman of Governors, Sir William Coldstream, Head of the Slade School of Fine Art and a former filmmaker as well as a painter of some distinction. Alarmed, the governors initiated a review of BFI policy and governance. The moving spirit behind the Policy Review, as they called it, was Dr David Kerr, a Labour MP who was a keen supporter of the Archive and was in the process of tabling a Private Member's Bill calling for Statutory Deposit of all British films in the Archive, analogous to the Statutory Deposit of books in the British Library.

The governing body now split in various directions. Kerr thought the main problem was insufficient and amateurish oversight by the governors themselves. Michael Balcon, the Chair of the Production Board, privately admitted to concerns about the role of film industry members of the governing body, who seemed to him (he was one himself) insufficiently supportive of the Institute and its purposes.[6] Some governors were concerned with financial transparency. Lindsay Anderson, supported by Karel Reisz, wanted the review to concentrate on policy, and in particular on the editorial policy of *Sight and Sound*, which in his opinion was no longer doing its best by British cinema (or at least the part of British cinema represented by Anderson and his friends). Receiving only lukewarm support, Anderson resigned, dragging Reisz with him. Meanwhile the Board was expressing concern about what was

6 Balcon Collection K/48.

going on in the BFI's Education Department and set up a subcommittee under Professor Asa Briggs, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex, to look into it, along with Reisz (later replaced by Helen Forman) and Paul Adorian from Associated Rediffusion.

The review rumbled on, ineffectually, through the summer of 1970. Meanwhile two things were happening, one inside the BFI and one outside. Inside the BFI, a group of twenty-nine middle-ranking staff wrote a letter on 15 May to the Director calling for more democracy and improved communications. Outside, Hatton and a group of fifteen or so other activists formed themselves into something called the BFI Members' Action Group (or Committee) and took legal advice on the powers which the BFI membership had to influence Institute policy. It turned out they had no powers at all, except that they could propose a motion at the AGM calling for the dismissal of any or all the governors. Since this was the only option open, they notified the BFI of their intention to propose motions to that effect and issued a manifesto entitled 'Why we want to dismiss the Governors', backing this up with a press campaign conducted mainly through the pages of *Time Out*.

The gathering storm spurred the governors into action. On 22–24 October they held an away-weekend at Balcon's country home in Sussex, during which they rejected Kerr's more radical proposals for partly devolving the Archive and the NFT from the rest of the BFI and rallied behind Stanley Reed in his efforts to hold the Institute together. They appointed a subgroup to write a report formalizing their majority view, but three governors – Balcon, Jocelyn Baines and George Hoellering – announced their intention of producing a minority report. Governors also urged Briggs to accelerate production of his subcommittee's report on the Education Department.

Meanwhile the twenty-nine staff signatories of the letter to the Director, angry at not having received more than token acknowledgment, wrote again on 16 November, requesting it be tabled at the next meeting of governors. For good measure, they also circulated it as a memo to all staff. This provoked a counter-letter from twenty-one other staff on the same grades, dated 5 December, expressing disagreement with the twenty-nine and guarded confidence in the management, thereby providing the management with a more amenable internal interlocutor.

As the date of the AGM (14 December) approached, panic set in among governors and senior management. Nobody knew what the constitutional position would be if the motion to dismiss the governors were to be passed at the meeting. The Department of Education and Science was evasive, and so were the BFI's lawyers. The lawyers were also unable to say whether BFI staff were entitled to vote. The management was afraid that, if they were, they might vote the wrong way.

The Action Group showed no sign of wishing to back down. It was a heterogeneous group, mainly London-centred. I was a member of it, but not very active, being the only one who did not live in London. Five of

the group – Maurice Hatton, Steve Dwoskin, Mark Forstater, Roger Graef and Simon Hartog – were independent filmmakers. Peter Sainsbury and Nick Hart-Williams were from The Other Cinema. Sainsbury was also founder-editor of *Afterimage*, along with Simon Field. Ian Cameron was an independent publisher and founder-editor with Victor Perkins of *Movie*. Perkins had worked in the BFI Education Department, as had Peter Wollen. Wollen, Jon Halliday and Ben Brewster were on the board of *New Left Review*. Phil Hardy and Claire Johnston were freelancers. Nicholas Garnham had been a BBC producer and was now a university lecturer, as was I. The group's interests were varied and ranged from popular cinema (particularly American), to political cinema, to the artistic avant garde. What united the group, besides our age (all between twenty-five and thirty-five), was a sense that the BFI represented a stifling orthodoxy which failed to pay attention to any of these areas; that its middle-of-the-road policies were an expensive failure; and that not only was it out of touch with the live elements of the film culture but that it abused its monopoly position actively to keep the culture stagnant and restrictive.

Given the diversity of interests among the group, it was not easy to agree on a common platform and the manifesto finally agreed on was something of a compromise. It called for:

1. A halt to the uncontrolled spread of the Regional Film Theatres.
2. More coherence to NFT programming, with input from the Education Department.
3. An end to the abuse of the BFI's privileged and monopoly position as film distributor and publisher of *Sight and Sound*.
4. A change in Production Board policy away from attempts to produce feature films.
5. Less emphasis on preservation at the National Film Archive and more on availability.
6. A less hierarchical membership structure.
7. More coherence and more democracy in the way the BFI was run.
8. More emphasis on research and less subservience to the industry.

At the meeting each member of the group proposed his or her own motion to dismiss a particular governor. These were put to the vote and were defeated by 189 votes to 90. The Group then called for a postal ballot, at which it was even more heavily defeated: 4425 votes were cast; 225 for bloc removal of all the governors and 3852 for retention, and 348 mixed ballots with people voting to remove some governors but not others.[7]

Fortified by this result, the management and governors decided to make no concessions to the twenty-nine radical staff, but did offer some sop in the direction of the moderate twenty-one.

From the point of view of the rebels, worse was to come. On 14 January, Professor Briggs delivered his report on the Education Department. No copy of this report survives in the BFI archives, nor have I been able to find a copy anywhere else, but it is not difficult to

7 The total number of 'Full Members' of the BFI (the category entitled to vote) was 14,060. The main benefit of Full rather than Associate membership was the inclusion of a subscription to *Sight and Sound* in the membership package, so it is not surprising that the majority of voting members were broadly content with what the BFI had to offer.

reconstruct its contents. It proposed scaling down the Department's activities, reducing it to a support and advisory role, and cutting the umbilical cord that linked it to the Society for Education in Film and Television, then publisher of *Screen*. It is hard to say, without having read it, what thinking lay behind the report. Perhaps not very much. Yet it is not hard to suspect a strong current of anti-intellectualism and a distaste for the new ideas being canvassed, for example, in the joint Education Department/SEFT seminars – most notably the explosive conjunction of Marxism and semiotics.

The governors accepted the report and the management was charged with its implementation. Paddy Whannel refused to give ground. Negotiations between Whannel and director Stanley Reed foundered acrimoniously and had to be conducted via a third party, Ernest Lindgren, Curator of the National Film Archive. In August 1971, Whannel announced his resignation, together with that of five other members of department staff. Their letter of resignation was circulated as an all-staff memo and subsequently published in *Screen*. In response to the memo, Lindgren sent out a memo of his own, giving the management point of view. In it Lindgren picks up on a phrase which was only just beginning to come into currency: 'I will only say,' Lindgren writes, 'that when this letter, in its last sentence, argues that the purpose of the British Film Institute is "to play a central role in creating a film culture" it is going against governors' policy and I believe this to be the crux of the whole dispute'. He goes on, 'The proper role of a public organisation in a democratic state is to provide the information and the facilities to enable people to make up their own minds about the nature of film and its purpose in society'. Finally, 'It is not the job of the Institute . . . to develop and promulgate one particular film culture'.[8]

Fine sentiments, but hypocritical – or, more likely, insufficiently self-aware, precisely because the Institute did develop and promulgate, although not very effectively, a particular culture. Since this culture, however, was that of a handful of canonical classics, plus some more recent art films, preferably erotic in a tasteful way, and simply seemed *natural* to Lindgren and his peers, the irony of the situation was not understood.

In the autumn matters improved. The new Chairman of Governors, Denis Forman, held a meeting with SEFT and other educationists and succeeded in allaying their fears about the future of *Screen*. He was also in the chair at the next AGM when the Action Group again put forward its motions to dismiss the Board. This time the group succeeded and the motions were passed by a small majority, but the result, predictably, was overthrown in a postal ballot. Forman also obtained ministerial approval for a manoeuvre to ease some of the trade representatives off the Board of Governors and for an innovative scheme to have at least one governor appointed following a poll by members. The first governor thus appointed was a member of the Action Group, Nick Garnham. Inside the BFI, the dust soon settled. Reed's retirement, shortly followed by that of

8 Lindgren's memo is dated 20 August 1971. Copies in BFI Paper Archive Boxes 19 and 71. The resignation letter is in *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1971), pp. 2–8 .

Lindgren and the enforced departure of the Head of Film Services, John Huntley, meant wholesale renewal of senior management. By the mid 1970s the new Executive Committee contained only two survivors from the former Executive: the Controller of the NFT, Leslie Hardcastle, and the Editor of *Sight and Sound*, Penelope Houston. Members of the twenty-nine who were promoted included Clyde Jeavons, who became Deputy Curator of the Archive, and Brenda Davies, who joined the new Executive. Colin McArthur, who was made Acting Head of Education after Whannel and the others left, was later promoted to take charge of Huntley's former empire, bringing to the BFI's film distribution arm a commitment to the very concept of film culture that Lindgren had sought to banish. Meanwhile the Education Department, although renamed Educational Advisory Service in order to reflect its supposed downgrading, continued the work pioneered by Paddy Whannel and the group he had formed around him in the 1960s.

All this, of course, was fiercely contested and the 1970s continued to be a turbulent time in the BFI – as indeed it was in the surrounding culture. However, the turbulence was highly productive and the battles of 1970 proved to have been well worth fighting.

The struggle for funding: sponsorship, competition and pacification

PETER THOMAS

This essay analyzes the interaction between an artists' cooperative and a state arts funding bureaucracy over a fifteen-year period. Given the divergent aims, operational philosophies and internal structures, it is not surprising that their viewpoints differed, and that they frequently failed to appreciate each other's position. Likewise, the kinds of documents they produced, and the extent to which they have been preserved, differ, sometimes quite radically. Taken separately, the document collections tell largely separate stories, even where they deal with the same events. The conflict is frequently worst where the documents are dealing with the same events because, fundamentally, the conflict was over who would control cultural production and provision, and what means would best deliver it. While these perspectives cannot be unified, aspects of them can be described and considered. The following account gives more attention to the artists' co-op, partly because it was the first of the organizations to concern itself with experimental film, and partly because this conflict, and the co-op's activities before it, are rarely written about and sometimes poorly understood.

October 1966 was a significant month in the London 'underground' movement. On 11 October, an underground newspaper called the *International Times* (*IT*) was founded by, amongst others, John 'Hoppy' Hopkins and Jim Haynes. It had an editor but no editorial policy – whatever was sent in was printed. As the paper was not expected to pay for itself, a bootstrapping operation was devised whereby a series of benefit events supported the paper and publicized its existence, while the paper publicized the events. At the first of these on 15 October, a band called Pink Floyd got its first public notice, and the London Film-makers'

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Co-operative (LFMC), formed earlier that week as an open-access film distributor and freewheeling underground exhibition group, had its first show. In the next month LFMC held its first major film series, the 'Spontaneous Festival of Underground Film'[1] (which received four pages of coverage in *IT*, written, of course, by LFMC),[2] and then filled the rest of the year with a series of open screenings in which anything that turned up on the night was projected. At Christmas, the *IT* events shifted to a fixed venue, the UFO Club, where the LFMC provided projections throughout the six months that the UFO survived,[3] alongside lightshows, bands, jugglers, performance artists, food stalls and so forth.

By mid-1967, as UFO was being ejected from its venue, *IT* founder Jim Haynes was working with others to found the first UK Arts Lab. When it opened in September at Drury Lane, it had a theatre, coffee shop, gallery and a cinema run by LFMC member David Curtis, who had previously been projecting films at the UFO.[4] A film workshop formed which later merged with the LFMC, bringing production, distribution and exhibition together in the same organization. A new activist philosophy was propounded whereby the filmmaker would operate and be responsible across all the areas from making to showing. It is a central feature of this period that many of the artist filmmakers not only made films, but also built and maintained equipment, and organized and promoted shows. Later they carried equipment, knocked holes in walls to get equipment out of difficult buildings, did DIY renovations to new sites, and lobbied for funds.

The LFMC was a *resource* for the activist milieu that had created it to answer their own needs. Its distribution collection was an important resource for programmers and budding event managers, and guaranteed the availability of films that might otherwise be dispersed across their various makers. The cinema exposed the work, and an equipment collection was created in the workshop. The LFMC existed and grew because it was to the advantage of its activist membership that it do so.[5] At the point of merger it was made clear that LFMC was to be a *filmmakers'* organization – owned by, and run for the benefit of, filmmakers. These are some of the points ratified by the vote:

1. The co-op should be a service run by filmmakers (and filmmakers only.)
   i. . . . all decisions should be rejected or endorsed by reference to the film-makers.
   ii. there are no policy decisions to make – the co-op is a service.
2. There are no taste decisions – ALL films submitted will be accepted . . .
3. Whoever is prepared to take responsibility for a sphere of activity will be responsible for making all of the decisions in that field, and will announce them in the NEWSLETTER. Should any controversy arise, a vote will be taken at a meeting.[6]

In this way, by 1975 the LFMC had organized or supplied the films for over sixty events at festivals and galleries across the world.[7] This level of

1 A title possibly related to the Spontaneous Underground at the Marquee Club earlier that year, where an unknown band called The Pink Floyd Sound became a fixture at the weekly variety performances. See Barry Miles, *In the Sixties* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), pp. 98–106.

2 'Underground Film Festival Supplement', *The International Times*, 31 October to 13 November 1966. Source: British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection (BAFVSC).

3 David Curtis, 'English avant-garde film: an early chronology', in Rodney Wilson (ed.), *Perspectives on British Avant-Garde Film.* Hayward Gallery catalogue (London: Arts Council/Hayward Gallery, 1977), p. 10.

4 Ibid. See also Michael Maziere, 'Interview with David Curtis', available at http://www.arts.ac.uk/research/filmcentre/maziere/interviews/Curtis.html [22 October 2006].

5 Peter Thomas, Interview with Peter Gidal, 17 October 2005.

6 LFMC: Notice of Film-Makers' General Meeting, 13 March 1968, p. 2. Source: BAFVSC.

7 LFMC, Application for Assistance to the BFI, Summer 1975, pp. 7–8. A list of events is provided. Source: BAFVSC.

activity, conducted by the filmmakers themselves, did a great deal to raise the profile of experimental and avant-garde film.

The Drury Lane Arts Lab folded under the pressure of its debts in October 1969.[8] Jim Haynes's farewell letter notes that, despite two years of considerable multimedia achievement, no support was received from an Arts Council which gave £37,000 annually to the kitchens of the Royal Opera House.[9] The Arts Council was, in fact, groping towards a way to support such projects. Since one of the problems was that many applications from the underground related to mixed media whereas Arts Council panels were single media, the Council created the New Activities Committee (NAC) to assess such applications.[10] Despite this, an artists' group, Friends of the Arts Council – Operative (FACOP), referred to by Arts Council observers as 'the London extremists',[11] was formed to assess the Arts Council's activities.[12] FACOP's central demand in 1969 was for the Arts Council to be replaced by an 'Artists' Council', which would be democratically elected at meetings – such as those organized by FACOP.[13] This idea, and FACOP's periodic infiltration and railroading of the Arts Council, infuriated its Chair, Michael Astor, but he comforted himself that such an 'Artists' Council' would 'bring together and identify the extremists, the nihilists, those who are given to raving in public and one or two more serious political activists'.[14] He offered them £50 from his own pocket.

At this time FACOP was organizing activities from the Institute for Research in Art and Technology (IRAT), also known as the New Arts Lab, housed in a derelict fire station found by 'Hoppy' Hopkins. IRAT applied to the Arts Council for support in order to fit out an exhibition/concert space which would accommodate a cinema, theatre, carpentry workshop, electronic and cybernetic workshop, video workshop, the LFMC, and a metal and plastic workshop.[15] While the Council considered IRAT's application to be high quality, inexpensive and backed by a strong team,[16] as had been the case with the Drury Lane Arts Lab the year before, no help emerged, although Secretary General Hugh Willatt did write a supportive letter to the Greater London Council.[17] What this demonstrates is not that the Arts Council was monolithically suspicious of the underground, despite areas of hostility. Rather, as LFMC member Malcolm LeGrice observed in his report at a FACOP seminar, there was a deep split in the Arts Council between those who favoured a remit which emphasized the provision of traditional forms of art to a wide public, and those who were committed to a new mission of supporting contemporary and experimental activity.[18]

In the midst of all this, the LFMC received its first substantial donation; not from the Arts Council, or from the British Film Institute (BFI), which they had also approached, but from an 'underground millionaire'. Victor Herbert, the wealthy businessman who donated the

8 Jim Haynes, 'Newsletter 1', 28 October 1969, available at http://www.jim-haynes.com/letters/newsletters/N.1%20ArtsLab28Oct69.pdf [22 October 2006]

9 Ibid. The letter also contains an abbreviated list of the lab's achievements. See also Richard Witts, *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council* (London: Little Brown Books, 1998), pp. 473–4.

10 Hugh Willatt (Secretary-General, ACGB), *Arts Council of Great Britain: New Activities*, Council Paper 433, 10 October 1968. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum, Arts Council of Great Britain (VAM/ACBG): Records, 1927–1997; ACGB/35/146 Box N.2. Unless otherwise stated, all documentation relating to the New Activities Committee, FACOP, the Drury Lane Arts Lab and IRAT is from this box.

11 Dennis Andrews, Minute Paper to Hugh Willatt on the National Artists' Assembly, 27 October 1969, p. 1. The New Activities Committee, which then contained several FACOP members, paid for the Assembly.

12 *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 June 1969. This appears to be free publicity for FACOP's conference of 8 June. See also David Bieda (for FACOP), Letter to Michael Astor (Chair, New Activities Committee), 28 May 1969.

13 See John Lifton and Robert Dodd, 'Presentation of the Case', undated.

14 Michael Astor, undated report to Hugh Willatt, pp. 3–4. Note also the Arts Council's fine collection of FACOP documents.

15 See IRAT: Information Bulletin 2, July 1969; 'The New Arts Laboratory Project', undated; Biddy Peppin, Letter to Hugh Willatt, 26 June 1969.

16 Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the New Activities Committee, 20 February 1969, p. 2.

17 Hugh Willatt, Letter to David Curtis, 20 May 1969. Source: BAFVSC.

18 Malcolm LeGrice, 'Patronage Seminar', *Circuit*, nos. 10/11 (July–August 1969), p. 3.

£500 that started the *International Times*,[19] gave LFMC £3000 for printing and processing equipment.[20]

Throughout the early 1970s, as the LFMC built up its distribution collection and gave exposure to work in and out of the UK, and as its members used the workshop to make films which have become the mainstay of UK avant-garde film retrospectives, lobbying continued for support and recognition from national subsidy bodies. In 1972 artist–activist Malcolm LeGrice accepted appointment to the BFI Production Board,[21] and in 1973 activist David Curtis accepted appointment to the Arts Council's new Artists' Films Sub-Committee (AFSC).[22] LeGrice lobbied the Production Board to support production by funding workshops rather than individuals, which, FACOP-style, would allow works to be made without being constrained by the Board's interests.[23] At the same time, the AFSC awarded small grants for productions whose real expense was often deferred by the LFMC workshop. Little of this touched the LFMC until another premises crisis arose in 1975. The urgency of this allowed for a change that opened the way to substantial BFI support.

LFMC had made an unsuccessful application to the Group Support Fund for less than £5000, but the Production Board believed that the workshop equipment which it had applied for 'could not be efficiently utilised without there also being a paid operator/instructor'.[24] When the negotiations were over, the Production Board committed £16,000 – half as much again as the entire Group Support Fund – to meet the 'real needs' of LFMC, including the need for paid staff. While this began a series of annual grants that continued until 2001, and clearly addressed a pressing need, it also changed the Co-op. Voluntary organizers who had taken responsibility for distribution, workshop and screening activities became paid staff, while the volunteer secretary and treasurer roles atrophied. The role of the volunteer organizers was part of a wider volunteer effort, and, as no one was being paid, the organizer roles were a characteristic of a general, cooperative, volunteerist ethos. The successful application to the BFI Production Board had affirmed, under 'Future Developments': 'We want to expand'.[25] But what if the increased labour demands of this expansion coincided with a decrease in volunteerism? Furthermore, as LFMC had never previously been in a position to pay staff, now that it had staff it was locked into a subsidy system to maintain them.

1975 was a good time to expect expansion. In February, the First Festival of British Independent Film, held in Bristol, was a substantial success; and in November the dedication of an issue of *Studio International* to avant-garde film and video was both a real achievement and the source of several seminal, much reprinted essays.[26] Though LFMC work was prominent in the Festival of British Independent Film, it was through the prolonged lobbying of the organizers, Independent Cinema West, that the Festival had received BFI and Arts Council funding,[27] and the Festival programme itself included work from many of

19 Jim Haynes, *Thanks for Coming!* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). Miles, *In the Sixties*, p. 133.

20 Michael Maziere, Interview with Malcolm LeGrice, available at http://www.studycollection.co.uk/maziere/interviews/LeGrice.html [22 October 2006]

21 Malcolm LeGrice, Letter to Keith Lucas (BFI Director), 8 April 1975. Source: BAFVSC. Maziere, Interview with Malcolm LeGrice.

22 Hugh Willatt, Letter to David Curtis, 2 February 1973. Source: BAFVSC. Maziere, Interview with David Curtis.

23 Maziere, Interview with Malcolm LeGrice.

24 Peter Sainsbury (BFI Production Board), Letter to William Raban (LFMC), 17 April 1975, p. 1. Source: BAFVSC.

25 Undated LFMC application to BFI Production Board, Summer 1975, p. 11. Source: BAFVSC.

26 See *Studio International* vol.190, no. 978 (November 1975).

27 David Hopkins, 'Programme of The First Festival of British Independent Film'. Independent Cinema West, February 1975. Source: BAFVSC.

the other radical workshops then in existence. These disparate groups had formed their own body, the Independent Filmmakers' Association (IFA), the previous year. The term 'Independent' had come to signal a broad coalition of groups of filmmakers and kinds of filmmaking, from campaign and community groups to the avant garde, and the Bristol festival was a celebration of this. The beginnings of support and recognition from key funders was seen as part of the success of this broader coalition.

Until 1976, the Arts Council's Artists' Films Sub-Committee had largely confined its support to production awards and bursaries. From 1976, however, it turned its attention to the wider public exposure of the work it had subsidized. The Film-Makers on Tour scheme (FMOT) was piloted in 1977, making selected AFSC-funded filmmakers available with a night's programme for £10. AFSC-funded filmmakers received £30 plus travel to accompany a programme of films which was made available to venues. While the intention was to increase exposure and find new audiences, the most obvious effect was the simultaneous growth and migration of the Art College market from LFMC to FMOT.[28] LFMC's distribution wing had been organizing small shows for its members and for college venues, charging between £25 and £60 and taking a ten percent rental charge.[29] With the FMOT, the hirer group which had been developed and serviced by the LFMC began to transfer its allegiances to a subsidized Arts Council scheme, which brought considerable cost advantages while still retaining access to the same filmmakers and prints, many of which were still in the LFMC distribution collection.

In 1977 the Arts Council organized a massive retrospective of UK artists' film at its own Hayward Gallery. Nearly all the UK works at the 'Perspectives on the British Avant-Garde Film' exhibition were made at and distributed by LFMC. LFMC, however, was not mentioned in the exhibition programme. As the introductory notes to the catalogue make clear, the retrospective was of work supported by the Artists' Films Sub-Committee.[30]

At the same time, the LFMC, sponsored by the British Council, had organized a show in Paris, and was looking forward to future British Council collaborations and more programme packages.[31] In late 1977, however, as the international touring version of the Hayward show, heavily sponsored by the Arts Council and the British Council, reached contract stage, the LFMC and its members perceived that they were being pushed into the background and their historic functions were being taken over. A series of fractious meetings was called in December to deal with 'the position of the Co-op's Distribution Office in view of the Arts Council's heavily subsidised screenings of films'.[32] These meetings at least managed to persuade the AFSC to lift its price to venues and to increase the payments to filmmakers.[33]

Much of the discussion was focused on the 'Perspectives on the British Avant-Garde Film' touring exhibition. LFMC had believed that the

28 Minutes of the Artists' Films Committee, 2 May 1977, p. 2. Source: VAM/ACGB/54/60, Box 3. David Curtis (AFVSC), Letter to Stuart Marshall, 30 October 1981. Source: VAM/ACGB/56/96, Box 2.

29 Felicity Sparrow (LFMC Distribution), Letter to Stan VanderBeek, 27 September 1978. Source: Lux, distribution ringbinder. William Raban, Letter to David Curtis (AFVSC), 24 October 1981, p. 1. Source: VAM/ACGB/56/96, Box 2.

30 See programme of *Perspectives on the British Avant-Garde*, Hayward Gallery, 2 March to 24 April 1977. Source: BAFVSC.

31 Felicity Sparrow (LFMC Distribution), Letter to Chris Garratt, 7 July 1977, p. 2. Source: Lux, distribution ringbinder.

32 Minutes of LFMC General Meeting, 10 December 1977, p. 1. Source: BAFVSC.

33 Minutes of the Artists' Films Committee, 23 January 1978, p. 1. Source: VAM/ACGB/54/60, Box 4.

package would be distributed only to continental Europe, and were then dismayed to find it competing with their own well-established slot at the Edinburgh Film Festival.[34] During the meetings in December 1977, LFMC Distribution began to fear that they would become merely a distributor of US films in the UK,[35] and were again dismayed to find that the next Arts Council touring package was of the US avant-garde filmmaker, Stan Brakhage, possibly LFMC's most popular distribution member.[36]

In the early 1970s, LFMC distribution had been challenged by Gate Cinema's attempt to acquire the cream of US avant-garde cinema, but as most of those filmmakers were members of various co-ops, LFMC could deploy co-op solidarity to block the Gate's supply.[37] Very little of this could be mustered to deal with the AFSC. Though this may not be a complete explanation, it is the case that shortly after the entry of BFI capital into the LFMC and Arts Council capital into the promotion of LFMC films, the urge to omnivorous volunteerism which had created and sustained the LFMC visibly subsided. In 1979 an artist–activist lamented 'a drift by many filmmakers toward being simply producers, whose responsibilities end by placing the film can in the Co-op cupboard'.[38] Some filmmakers were abandoning even that responsibility, and were keeping the films at home, available for FMOT screenings.[39] All this ran counter to the foundational philosophy of the LFMC, which was predicated on breaking down the segmentation within the film industry between production, distribution and exhibition, and the cultural hierarchies between artists, producers, critics and theorists. In the cultural politics of hard interests, however, when the BFI started paying for co-op services to be provided, and when the AFSC offered alternative promotional opportunities and income streams, the question of what the LFMC, as a cooperative, was still for, was a deep one.

In 1980, when the LFMC faced a massive rent/deficit crisis as a result of their funded expansion, the renamed Artists' Film and Video Sub-committee (AFVSC) provided one answer to the question of LFMC's value to its community:

> The cinema there is the main venue for showing films produced with the film awards and bursaries [from the AFVSC] and their equipment is used in the actual production of these films. [If the LFMC closed down] There would be an immediate reflection of this in greatly increased costs in artists' applications.[40]

However, by 1980, even the AFVSC began to observe a creeping passivity in the experimental film milieu, particularly evident in a lack of applications for exhibitions.[41] Committee member and LFMC artist–activist, Guy Sherwin, suggested that the existing schemes were not engaging, and proposed a flexible programme where anyone could pitch a short programme of work of their choice. Extra prints would be made so as not to interfere with existing distribution, and existing distributors could be paid to service the packages on the AFVSC's behalf.[42] This

34 Felicity Sparrow (LFMC Distribution), Announcement of Meeting 9 January, undated; Announcement of Distribution Meeting 6 March, 16 February 1978. Source: BAFVSC.

35 Minutes of LFMC General Meeting, 10 December 1977, p. 2. Source: BAFVSC.

36 Simon Field, Letter to Stan Brakhage, 9 October 1978. Source: Lux, distribution ringbinder. Minutes of the Artists' Films Committee, 18 December 1978, p. 2. Source: VAM/ACGB/54/60, Box 4.

37 Thomas, Interview with Peter Gidal.

38 Mike Leggett, LFMC General Meeting 28.10.78. Discussion Paper, p. 1. Source: BAFVSC.

39 Felicity Sparrow (LFMC Distribution), Letter to Chris Garratt, 10 August 1977; David Finch (LFMC Distribution), Letter to Tim Cawkwell, 25 August 1982. Source: Lux, distribution ringbinder.

40 LFMC: Application for Accumulated Deficit Grant, 13 February 1981, p. 2. This is an internal AC document, not the application from the LFMC. Source: VAM/ACGB/58/7.

41 Minutes of the Artists' Film and Video Committee, 28 April 1980, pp. 6–11. Source: VAM/ACGB/54/60, Box 6.

42 Guy Sherwin, Proposal for a Modular Film Exhibition Programme – For Discussion, June 1980 and June/September 1980. Source: VAM/ACGB/55/28. Minutes of the Artists' Film and Video Sub-Committee, 27 October 1980, pp. 2–3. Source: VAM/ACGB/54/60, Box 6.

could potentially give the lead back to the artists themselves, and reform the linkage between maker and audience. Although several excellent packages emerged, the response was relatively slight and slow, especially compared with the energy that had once existed. Opening for applications in mid-1981, this 'Modular Scheme' was collapsed into the 'Umbrella Scheme', later Film and Video Umbrella, only months after the first Modular package became available in early 1983.[43] Under the Umbrella Scheme, touring packages were programmed by an AFVSC appointee and conditions for distributors were less generous.[44]

What is especially ironic about this final scenario of filmmaker passivity is that the activities taken over by AFSC schemes largely originated in the activist milieu, and were indeed carried out for the AFSC by the activists who were formed in that milieu. The desire for wider exposure of work was general at the LFMC, as was the urge to pursue subsidy, but in this case the outcome was the evisceration of that milieu and ethos which had been the source of the films, the ideas, and the energy.

43 Subsidized Exhibitions: April 1983/84 (packages and venues), undated, 1984, pp. 1–3. Minutes of the Artists' Film and Video Sub-Committee, 19 April 1983, pp. 2–3 and 20 June 1983, pp. 8–9. Source: VAM/ACGB/54/60, Box 9.

44 Minutes of the Artists' Film and Video Sub-Committee, 5 March 1984, pp. 4–5. Source: VAM/ACGB/54/60, Box 9.

Agency vs archive: London Film-Makers' Co-op and LVA vs Film and Video Umbrella[1]

JULIA KNIGHT

The London Film-makers' Co-op (LFMC) and London Video Arts (LVA)[2] were both set up – in 1966 and 1976, respectively – by artists for artists, and were thus shaped by the artists' own concerns. With regard to their distribution activities, as Peter Thomas notes in his discussion of the LFMC in the preceding article, this led on the one hand to the implementation of open acquisitions policies whereby any artist could have their work in distribution simply by lodging a copy of it with one of the organizations, and on the other to trying to ensure that this work then reached audiences. However, as the size of the distribution libraries grew over the years, the former tended to undermine the possibility of achieving the latter. The organizations were unable to keep up with the cataloguing of new work being deposited with them and often lacked the funds to produce a catalogue of the hundreds of works that they now housed, while workers were often familiar with only a small portion of the work they distributed. As one LVA worker described it: 'Eventually there were too many titles to make sense of it. In reality, most tapes sat on the shelves, not even catalogued'.[3] For the same reasons, by the 1980s there were fairly frequent complaints from filmmakers that they hardly, if ever, got bookings via the Co-op.

Although other factors had contributed to this state of affairs, the distribution workers at both organizations recognized that, despite the worthy ideological stance informing their open acquisitions policies, they needed to promote *curated* programmes or packages of work. This was the only way they could reach audiences with at least some of the

1 This article is based on research conducted as part of a three-year AHRC-funded research project (2002–2005) examining independent/artists' film and video distribution in the UK from the 1970s to date. A version of the article was given as a paper as part of the 'Cultural Consecration and its Discontents: the Arts Council v. Film and Video Artists' Organisations, 1975 to Present' panel, which was the closing plenary session of the Screen Studies Conference, July 2005.

2 LVA was renamed LEA (London Electronic Arts) in 1994, but for the sake of simplicity and to avoid any confusion, the organization is referred to as LVA throughout this paper.

3 Comedia Consultancy, 'London Video Artists Management Review, November 1988', p. 15.

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work they distributed and, thereby, raise awareness of artists' film/video. Both the LFMC and LVA, however, were hampered in doing this, albeit in different ways.

The LFMC had a policy which disallowed the promotion of any individual works or artists over any other. Hence it was limited – at least until the 1990s – to curating shows outside of its own cinema space, or for other organizations. In 1977, for instance, the LFMC organized a show in Paris. In the same year they also wrote to a filmmaker requesting additional prints as they '[are] particularly useful when we compile an anthology of British Co-op films for sending abroad'.[4] A few years later in 1981, as Thomas also notes, LFMC member-artist Guy Sherwin proposed a flexible 'modular' scheme to the Arts Council, whereby anyone could suggest a short programme of work for touring to venues.

In 1984 and 1985 LVA, for its part, in the face of ongoing criticism of its exhibitions policy from the Arts Council[5] and a perceived 'directive to "go national"',[6] put together proposals to transform itself by merging its distribution and exhibition activities into a 'promotional bureau' which was entirely separate from its other activities.[7] While they intended to continue promoting individual tapes, they stated that 'an increasing emphasis will be laid on *programme packages* intended for touring, sale, and ultimately, broadcast'.[8] Although the Arts Council rejected LVA's proposals on both occasions,[9] LVA went ahead with some reforms during this period. It introduced a two-tier distribution model which actively promoted only a proportion of its library, consigning everything else to an archive, and it concentrated more effort on curated gallery shows and events.[10] It did, however, manage to launch a one-off touring exhibition, Genlock, in 1987–88.

Although the Arts Council did not support LVA's plans to transform what was rapidly becoming an archive into a promotional agency, it nevertheless agreed with the need for curated shows and packages to help develop audiences. In fact, it engaged in this area of activity itself, often drawing on the ideas developed within LFMC/LVA circles and employing their former distribution and exhibition workers. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, for instance, the Arts Council set up the Film-Makers on Tour (FMOT) scheme, instigated Sherwin's suggestion of a modular scheme, and launched an Animateur scheme to address the needs of venues. To encourage take-up by exhibition venues, all the Arts Council schemes were heavily subsidized to reduce hire rates, thereby undercutting the LFMC and LVA pricing structures. As a distribution worker at LFMC noted, the subsidized rates of the FMOT had an almost immediate impact on its promotional activity and the arranging of shows: 'The AC has undermined the Co-op in this activity as we don't arrange shows anymore as people can get them in this package deal with the AC.'[11] Although the Arts Council eventually withdrew the FMOT scheme, in late 1983 it merged the modular and Animateur schemes into a single in-house curatorial initiative called the Film and Video Umbrella (FVU). FVU had a specific remit to select and promote touring

4 Letter from Felicity Sparrow at LFMC to Chris Garratt, 10 August 1977.

5 See Minutes of the Arts Council Artists' Film and Video Sub-Committee, 5 March 1984, p. 7 and Minutes of Arts Council Artists' Film and Video Sub-Committee 13 March 1985, p. 7.

6 Undated letter from Jeremy Welsh at LVA, written in response to Artists' Film and Video Sub-Committee meeting on 13 March 1985, p. 2.

7 LVA 1984–85 Revenue Application to the Arts Council, p. 3.

8 Ibid, p. 5. My emphasis.

9 The rejections were based mainly on the argument that the proposed programmes and packages were not particularly imaginative or inspiring. See Minutes of the Arts Council Artists' Film and Video Sub-Committee, 5 March 1984 and 13 March 1985.

10 Such as the Channel 5 (1985) and Channel 6 (1986) shows at multiple sites across London, coordinated by Jeremy Welsh at LVA.

11 Letter from Felicity Sparrow at LFMC, 14 October 1977.

packages.[12] In order to expand its activities and allow it to benefit from the Arts Council's national touring fund, however, the Arts Council relaunched the FVU in 1988 as an independent revenue-funded curatorial agency. Very soon thereafter, FVU employed both LVA's former Shows/Distribution worker and a former LFMC cinema organizer.

At one level, it is possible to argue that all this paved the way for a clearly defined division of labour, and introduced a complementary relationship between the newly independent FVU and the artists' organizations. On the one hand, the LFMC and LVA could maintain their collections as extensive and valuable resources for use by curators (including those at the FVU), and deal with the distribution of individual titles, but could, at the same time, concentrate their energies in a more focused way on workshop, access, training and exhibition activities – for which they seemed to be able to attract funding more readily. On the other hand, FVU was funded to do the labour-intensive work of selecting and compiling packages, marketing, building relationships with venues, arranging tours and publicity, and providing contextual information to help build up audiences.

The Video Umbrella was, however, fairly quickly perceived to be highly effective at increasing the overall exposure of artists' film and video. In February 1990 the Arts Council reported that, 'The Umbrella has been recognized by the London Funders Group (BFI/GLA/LBGS/C4) as the best model for future investment in independent sector distribution/exhibition initiatives'.[13] Whilst any investment in the distribution of artists' film and video was to be welcomed, this privileging of the curatorial model suggested that there would be little funder support in the future for maintaining the extensive and important collections built up by the LFMC and LVA. Furthermore, the funders' endorsement of FVU belied the early curatorial ideas and initiatives of the artists' organizations. This, in turn, laid the basis for some quite hostile conflicts, and, from the end of the 1980s – when FVU became an independent revenue client – through to the mid 1990s, allowed a more general competition to emerge between the LFMC and LVA on the one hand and FVU on the other.

One of the problems that beset the relationship was that the LFMC and LVA had a very different rationale for their existence to the FVU. The LFMC and LVA were set up by artists for artists to support them in their creative practice. Thomas cites the LFMC policy statement in his article; similarly, in LVA's mission statement it was stated that: 'LVA is run for artists and . . . aims to be a national centre for the advancement and encouragement of the innovative use of video and electronic media for artists'.[14] At the level of distribution, this meant that it saw itself – and this is still true of its successor organization, the Lux, today – as existing to represent and protect the interests of the artists whose work it distributed. Importantly, this informed the royalty split that both artists' organizations set up, which was weighted heavily in favour of the artist.

12 Part of the reason for merging the two schemes was financial. The modular scheme purchased its own prints so as not to interrupt existing distribution activity, but this proved an expense the Arts Council did not wish to sustain. By contrast, the FVU had to hire whatever was available.

13 Internal memo from Rodney Wilson to Ian Reid, Arts Council of Great Britain, 28 February 1990, p. 2.

14 Cited in LVA three-year plan, undated, covering the financial years 1988–89, 1989–90 and 1990–91, received by the Arts Council 3 January 1989, p. 3.

Both organizations also endeavoured to safeguard or maximize the financial return to artists wherever they could.

The Umbrella on the other hand had been brought into existence by a funding body, with a specific remit to get work into exhibition venues, and, typically, it aimed to book packages into between eight and twelve venues over a six- to nine-month period. As with earlier Arts Council initiatives, however (and as it reiterated time and again in various correspondence throughout the 1980s and 1990s), FVU had to make its packages available to venues at a subsidised rate if it was to persuade them to take the risk involved in booking experimental work. To be able to offer that subsidized rate, the Umbrella was dependent on distributors and artists letting it hire their work for the tours at discounted rates. Thus, the curatorial model developed by the Umbrella only worked if both the artists and artists' organizations were willing to accept a lower financial return.

LVA appears to have seen the longer-term benefits of participating in Umbrella tours and gaining exposure, and was, therefore, initially willing to do such deals. It quickly created a problem for the LFMC, however, since for the most part, it was unwilling to reduce its prices. As a result its work was rarely included in the FVU packages. This, of course, meant that, as the Umbrella gradually raised the profile of other experimental work, LFMC work became increasingly marginalized.

On a rare occasion, however, when LFMC work was not only included, but comprised all the films in an Umbrella package, it resulted in a particularly heated conflict between the two organizations. In April 1990, FVU was due to release the 'Metaphors, Monologues and Landscapes' touring programme of LFMC films. A few weeks before the tour was due to start, the LFMC wrote to FVU complaining it had not been paid for a previous tour and asserting that the LFMC would lose bookings for the films while they were tied up in the forthcoming Umbrella tour.[15] It then threatened to withdraw the films until the outstanding debts were cleared.[16] The Umbrella responded by arguing that Regional Film Theatres 'are not prepared to pay' LFMC rates[17] and had only booked the package because of the subsidized rate that the Umbrella offered. It also pointed out that: '[as] all of the films for this package are coming from the Co-op . . . you get all the rentals from the tour. I find it hard to believe that you will get more money from individual bookings of some of these films than you would get from a whole tour.'[18] The exchange went on over a period of several weeks, clearly took up a lot of time, and became increasingly irate, with threats, abuse and accusations flying back and forth, until the two organizations finally agreed to negotiate a contract for their future dealings. In the end, the Umbrella model won out as artists increasingly favoured receiving a guaranteed lump sum royalty from a tour. In fact, artists were becoming increasingly inclined to deal directly with the Umbrella.

Around the same time, a further area of conflict emerged as a result of the favouring of the curatorial model when LVA renewed its attempts to

15 The LFMC had also levelled very similar complaints against the Arts Council-initiated and -funded Film-Makers On Tour scheme.

16 This exchange is documented in a series of letters between the two organizations dated from February through to July 1990.

17 Letter from Moiry Sweeney at FVU to the LFMC Executive, 12 July 1990.

18 Letter from Jeremy Welsh at FVU to Tony Warcus and Tom Heslop at LFMC, 9 March 1990.

distribute its own touring packages alongside FVU. Due to the LVA's previous difficulties in attracting funding for such activities, combined with the subsequent loss of a key distribution worker who was not replaced, its relatively low levels of distribution income and its wider spread of activities, LVA had been unable to develop distribution significantly. That changed, however, in 1989 as a result of a serious management review the previous year. The review of LVA was set in motion by one of its funders, Greater London Arts, and was undertaken by the consultancy company, Comedia. Comedia delivered its report in November 1988 and stressed that LVA needed to devote its energies to marketing the organization generally, and marketing tape distribution in particular. The main proposal to emerge from the report was to recruit a Distribution and Marketing Manager whose role would be to develop a marketing strategy and to concentrate on a small number of 'saleable' tapes. As the Arts Council was quick to note, this was the single biggest change proposed by the consultancy,[19] and it enabled LVA to attract the necessary funding to enter the touring package market, directly encroaching on FVU's core revenue funded activity.

This had an almost immediate impact. FVU noted in internal documentation that in 1990 the touring market was 'flooded'.[20] While it expressed some concern that there '[is] a limited market for the uptake of touring exhibitions', it did not, at this stage, regard it as a serious threat, judging that LVA was limited in the extent of its activities by the range of its commitments. The Umbrella did, however, take it as an indication that it needed to put some resources into selling itself if it was to retain its leading position. However, in 1995 FVU felt that the issue had become serious, when it discovered that, over a twelve-month period, the Arts Council had directly funded the production of four new LVA touring packages. In a letter to the Arts Council, FVU noted that this was only two fewer packages than the Umbrella itself was expected to produce, as its core activity, over a comparable period.[21] As with the LFMC conflict, this resulted in a fairly irate series of letters, this time from the Umbrella to the Arts Council, again over a period of weeks. The Umbrella's concerns were primarily twofold: first, that the potential competition presented by the Arts Council's direct support of LVA's packages could seriously impact on FVU's own performance in what was a fairly small market – and on which they were measured strictly against pre-set performance targets; and secondly, that LVA packages did not seem to be measured against comparable targets.

Whilst the Umbrella clearly felt they were not being treated fairly by the Arts Council, it is possible to argue that LVA's more concerted move into the touring package market was at least in part fuelled by the perception that FVU was, in its turn, encroaching on its territory as a distributor. This had happened to a degree in the late 1980s but became a more overt issue for the two organizations in the early 1990s when the Umbrella started to concentrate on video. The issue arose in part due to the greater flexibility of video over celluloid. With the film tours, it was

19 David Curtis, 'Report on Assessment Visit to LVA 29 November 1988, p. 2.

20 Letter from Jeremy Welsh to FVU Board, 30 January 1991, p. 1.

21 Letter from the Directors of FVU to David Curtis at the Arts Council, 20 November 1995.

fairly clear-cut that the prints were on loan and at the end of a tour they had to be returned to the distributor. With video, however, because of the ease of duplication, tours could be lengthened with little physical inconvenience to the distributor, and packages could in theory also be made available for sale. This made it possible for the Arts Council to increase its performance targets for the Umbrella. In the early 1990s it stipulated that FVU's annual grant was conditional upon it not only launching a minimum of seven new touring projects in the coming year, which should be 'substantially toured . . . benefiting an average of ten venues each', but also continuing to tour five projects from previous years, 'benefiting eight venues each'.[22] A couple of years later, the Arts Council also encouraged the Umbrella to apply for funding – which it was awarded – in order to develop VHS packages for sale to the educational sector.

Even before these increased requirements, as early as 1988–89 LVA felt FVU was effectively taking on the role of a sub-distributor, and was starting to refuse to send FVU all the tapes it requested.[23] LVA was also concerned about the ways in which the newly expanded and independent FVU would affect it.[24] Once the Umbrella was required to keep old tours in circulation for longer, however, and once it was invited to expand into the educational sales market, it is possible to argue that FVU was not only engaging in distribution but was functioning to a much greater extent as a direct competitor to LVA for the supply of certain material. Indeed, by the mid-1990s FVU had started to produce a programme booklet which, along the lines of a distributor's catalogue, provided a guide to material which, as they put it, was 'in active distribution',[25] and it started referring to itself on occasions as 'distributing' a particular work or artist.[26]

That the Umbrella and the artists' organizations should start to come into competition during this period is unsurprising when set against the wider context of the looming grant-aid crisis. Comedia summarized the situation in its 1988 report for LVA:

> Grant funding is either static or declining. However well LVA perform, it is likely to find its funding following this pattern of stagnation or decline. Whatever arts organisations may feel about this, they will have to respond pragmatically to survive by concentrating on earned income.[27]

As a result the funders – especially the Arts Council and the BFI – did everything in their power to encourage their revenue clients to start generating more earned income in order to supplement the dwindling grant-aid.[28] In this climate, all three organizations – LVA, LFMC and FVU – began to develop, augment and actively market their activities in order to try to increase the number of hires and/or sales from the work which they toured or distributed.

The Umbrella and LVA, in particular, drew up proposals that began to blur the previously quite clear-cut distinctions between them. On the one

22 Letter from the Arts Council to FVU, 23 December 1992.

23 See, for instance, Minutes of the LVA Council of Management Meeting, 8 March 1989, p. 3.

24 See Minutes of the LVA Council of Management Meeting, 11 May 1989, p. 4.

25 'Notes on Audience Figures 1996/7'; FVU document for the Arts Council, undated.

26 This may be the result of a general lack of clarity about what distribution is, or simply a sloppy use of terminology. However, it is evident from correspondence and contracts from the early-to-mid 1990s that some of the artists FVU was hiring work from directly for inclusion in its packages were paying careful attention to the wording of their contracts, precisely to ensure that FVU was not authorized to 'distribute' their work, but was being licensed to exhibit it in a particular context for a particular period.

27 Comedia Consultancy, 'London Video Artists Management Review, November 1988', p. 3.

28 Indeed, one of the concerns voiced by Greater London Arts when they initiated the Comedia consultancy to review LVA's activities in 1988 was precisely 'that distribution of tapes was not being maximized and as a result was not generating enough earned income'; letter from Felicity Sparrow at GLA to Alison Malone at LVA, 19 April 1988, p. 2.

hand, LVA spent the first half of 1989 planning how to implement the recommendations of the Comedia report; namely, to employ a new Distribution and Marketing Manager whose remit was to develop three areas: tape packages for hire or sale to educational institutions, galleries and so on; television sales, both domestic and overseas; and the identification of a small portfolio of between ten and twenty 'saleable' tapes to be prioritized and aggressively marketed each year. At the same time, FVU, also during the first half of 1989, submitted plans to the Arts Council to expand its core activities quite explicitly into distribution: to take on a small number of artists – between twelve and twenty – each year; to tackle television sales for those artists; and to move into VHS sales of tape packages, especially targeting the educational sector.[29]

The Arts Council was quick to respond to each organization with appropriate recommendations that prevented them from becoming mirror images of each other. The Umbrella was told that the move into distribution proper was 'premature' for the newly independent organization, and it was suggested it should concentrate on the core activity of touring programmes for which it was funded,[30] while LVA was told to prioritize television sales above all else,[31] as 'TV sales are the single most important money earner, and . . . non-TV exhibition cannot compete in that respect'. At the same time, it was indicated that any commitment by LVA to producing an annual catalogue – the comprehensive listing of a traditional distributor's holdings – was 'impractical and wasteful of resources'.[32]

While the LFMC and LVA had originally been set up by artists for artists, by the 1980s the Arts Council as a funder was clearly playing a key role in influencing their direction and development. Ironically, however, while both the Arts Council and the BFI tried to encourage their revenue clients to become more self-sustaining, the funders' favouring of the curatorial agency model had, in fact, the opposite effect. It led to LVA restructuring itself and the LFMC eventually undertaking internal reforms to enable both organizations to field curated packages more actively. As a result LVA and the LFMC ended up in the mid-1990s competing alongside FVU for national touring funding. While these curatorial initiatives did have significant successes in developing audiences, they did not significantly increase earned income for the organizations since the subsidy facilitated reduced hire prices. Hence the organizations' dependency on grant-aid did not decrease: rather, they became more dependent as the increased levels of activity required additional resourcing.

29 FVU, 'ACGB Report May 1989', p. 5.

30 David Curtis, 'Summary of 1st Annual Assessment Meeting with Film and Video Umbrella, July 13, 1989', Draft, p. 1.

31 David Critchley, 'Report on the GLA Annual Review Meeting held at LVA on 29.11.88.', December 1988, p. 4. The importance of television sales was reiterated again just after the appointment of LVA's new Distribution and Marketing Manager in autumn 1989. The Arts Council requested an action plan for 1990 indicating two or three main priorities for the year ahead and suggested that 'your success in selling 20 tapes to international television would do more to enhance LVA's reputation amongst both artists and the world video market than to achieve 200 rentals to galleries and colleges . . . Sorry to be heavy, but the issue is important and our funding is specific on purpose.' Letter from David Curtis at the Arts Council to Mike Maziere at LVA, 15 November 1989.

32 London Video Arts Assessment Meeting, 19 October 1987, p. 3.

Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 221 pp.
K.J. Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television*. London: British Film Institute, 2005, 192 pp.
Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004, 341 pp.

IAN GARWOOD

The last time a collection of screen music-related books was the subject of a *Screen* review, the reviewer Simon Frith was moved to note each work's 'self-defeating . . . need to draw attention to their subject's neglect' as well as the very limited manner in which the authors seemed 'to be engaged with each other'.[1] Judging by the books grouped together in the present review, the scholarship in the area is now much more collegiate, and the requirement on the authors to self-diagnose academic isolation seems to have become unnecessary. Annette Davison, K.J. Donnelly and Carol Vernallis share a plethora of critical references on music–image relationships, from Theodor Adorno to Philip Tagg and many points in between.

1 Simon Frith, *Screen*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2000), p. 335.

A substantial canon of academic writing on music in narrative film now exists, and it can no longer be claimed that music video is a scholarly blind spot (as Vernallis admits). Of the various media formats discussed in the books under review, only television music remains relatively under-represented academically (though Donnelly's two chapters on the subject begin the process of addressing this absence).

In this context, the authors' task would appear to be to present alternatives to existing work, or to bring new objects of study to critical light. All three studies make claims for their own originality by referencing a model of 'classical' narrative film music practices: a conceptualization of the soundtrack's role as fitting in with classical

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cinema's perceived storytelling priorities. For all the books' individual merits, the regular recourse to notions of the classical, even in the service of its refutation, raises interesting questions about the possibility (or impossibility) of doing without such a concept entirely. Thus, these works reveal the 'classical' to be a category as problematic yet insistent in writing on music–image relations as it is in other areas of screen studies enquiry.

As its title suggests, Davison's *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s* engages with classical film music theory most explicitly. Indeed, about a quarter of the book is devoted to the explication of, first, Classical Hollywood Cinema as it has been conceived academically, and second, the classical scoring practice associated with it (which Davison sees revived in the so-called 'post-classical' Hollywood of the mid 1970s onwards). This provides the ground on which Davison makes her key claim:

> The central argument of this book is that, by operating as a signifier of classical – and, indeed, New Hollywood cinema – the classical Hollywood score offered those making films outside and on the margins of Hollywood cinema in the 1980s and 1990s a further means by which they could differentiate their cinemas from Hollywood's, through the production of scores and soundtracks which critique or refer to this practice in particular ways (p. 59).

There follow close analyses of four films whose soundtracks, according to Davison, refer to the classical model at the same time as they offer an alternative. Through her sequencing of the case studies, Davison outlines possibilities of alternative practice that range from a total deconstruction of the classical soundtrack's conventional storytelling functions (as witnessed in Jean-Luc Godard's *Prenom: Carmen* [1983]) to the identification of a scoring practice that mimics certain aspects of the classical in its collaborative nature, yet provides a utopian alternative to it (as seen through David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* [1990]). In between, she explores the notion of the soundtrack as a 'liberating' force (Derek Jarman's *The Garden* [1990]), and the potential for a compromise to be found between classical and alternative models (Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* [1987]).

Davison's reading of each film is imaginative and very well detailed. She demonstrates a particular facility for identifying, and ascribing a significance to, different types of sound on the same soundtrack. This is done with particular success in her readings of *The Garden* and *Wings of Desire*. Her analysis does not seek to hide her evident musical training, but, in nearly all cases, remains intelligible and persuasive to non-musicologists such as myself (who will just have to accept the occasional use of musical notation as pretty pictures).

It is questionable how much of the extremely comprehensive scene-setting undertaken by Davison in the book's early sections is necessary for an appreciation of the individual film analyses. Nevertheless, her

summaries of discussions about classical and post-classical Hollywood cinema and the classical film score are exemplary, and they are conducted with a thoroughness which is understandable, perhaps, in a book which takes its place in the publisher's Popular and Folk Music series rather than in a screen studies collection.

There remains a mismatch, however, between the concentration on Hollywood as an institutional, industrial and ideological force in the early chapters of the book, and the auteurist bent of the analysis that follows in later chapters. For example, the chapter on 'New Hollywood cinema and (post-?) classical scoring' concludes with statistical information about US cinema's growth in the overseas market during the 1980s. Yet this detail seems unnecessary in the light of the subsequent interpretation of the various non-Hollywood soundtracks as *imaginative* responses to mainstream practices on the part of individual filmmakers. The division between descriptions of Hollywood as intransigently institutional, and the implicit understanding of art-house cinema as a space for the free expression of the auteur (made explicit in the celebration of Lynch in the final case study) is made too complacently and means that Davison does not fulfil her promise to engage 'with institutional issues in relation to film soundtracks and scores' (p. 6) in every case. In this respect, the book does not fully realize the potential of its many excellent parts.

The critical tone of Donnelly's *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* also fluctuates somewhat from section to section, although the reader is prepared for this by the author's early claim that the book is 'a rumination, an investigation of some of the elusive and fascinating aspects of screen music' (p. 3) rather than a more strictly hypothesis-based account.

Nevertheless, more concrete justification is given for the book's attention to a pleasingly eclectic range of material, which includes the work of canonized auteurs such as David Lynch and Stanley Kubrick, but also makes room for a discussion of the soundtracks of *Space: 1999*, a whole range of horror movies, and the role of music in television continuity segments. Donnelly characterizes screen music as something more intangible than is claimed in the more classical accounts focusing on the score's overt storytelling functions. Inspired, in particular, by the increasingly complex sound design of films produced for release in cinemas, Donnelly argues:

> While film music traditionally has been conceived as part of narration, working for film narrative, in some ways it would be better to see it as part of the film's repository of special effects (p. 2).

Determined to explore screen music's more 'unruly' qualities (at least when set against a narrative yardstick), Donnelly riffs around notions of music's 'ghostliness' in an imaginative manner. Particularly in relation to cinema, he sees the haunting activities of the soundtrack as constituting a kind of sensuous possession of the viewer. Donnelly

(somewhat contentiously given the medium's technological advances) is less willing to admit to the possessing capabilities of television soundtracks, but concentrates instead on another kind of 'haunting': the habitual use of familiar music in television that evokes the spectre of its 'lives' elsewhere as much as it applies itself to a particular televisual context.

It is the notion of screen music as always indicating another place that most usefully ties the different strands of Donnelly's eclectic study together. Through this interest in the 'elsewhere' of screen music, Donnelly successfully probes areas outside the reach of classical narrative film music theory, which attends to the here and now of the soundtrack's involvement in a particular fictional scenario. However, the value of the insights which ensue from this successful escape from a more classical approach is sometimes taken for granted. Donnelly's analyses as a whole lack the attention to detail which is one of the virtues of Davison's case studies. The author anticipates this criticism early on by acknowledging that the book 'provides a "long shot", allowing the sort of synoptic view unavailable to detailed analysis, rather than the predominant "close-up" of many preceding film music studies' (p. 3).

The loss, in terms of analytical depth, that this critical strategy necessitates, is not always compensated for by the book's commendable breadth. For example, a relatively sustained analysis of Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1996) is not as convincing as it might be due to an unwillingness to provide sufficient evidence for its claims. On the film's heavy use of pre-existing pop songs, Donnelly comments:

> Are these song appearances simple 'comments on the action'? I don't think so. It is more as if the action emanates from the songs themselves, particularly from their grain of sound and rhythmic aspects (p. 28).

This assertion is allowed to fend for itself, in the absence of more particular commentary about the interaction between the action and song in each specific case. The value of investigating screen music's less 'submissive' qualities in relation to narrative principles would be better advocated through a detailed interpretation that *also* engages with the possibility that the soundtrack fulfils more conventional storytelling functions. Characterizing the 'elsewhere' of screen music surely becomes more interesting if its relationship to other spaces is acknowledged and its own territory is mapped in detail.

Vernallis's *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* combines the imaginative facility that fires Donnelly's book with the attention to detail that characterizes Davison's. Her study is extremely comprehensive in fulfilling its promise to take 'the music of music video most seriously' (p. x), thereby 'attempting an analysis that takes musical codes, processes, and techniques as providing means by which video image can be structured' (p. 209). On one level, as Vernallis admits, this is a belated consolidation of the initiatives taken in Andrew

Goodwin's foundational music television study *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*.[2] In its implementation, however, Vernallis far exceeds this brief. There are chapters on narrative and editing, as you might expect from a study whose aim it is to deconstruct the form of the music video; less expected is the attention to aspects such as supporting performers, props and the sensual qualities of (aural and visual) space, colour, texture and time.

Even in the more predictable sections, Vernallis explores relationships between song and image which expand a critical understanding of the music video's possibilities. For instance, in the chapter on editing, she goes far beyond the standard notion that videos cut their images to the rhythm of the song, to suggest:

> Obviously, editing can reflect the basic beat pattern of the song, but it can also be responsive to all of the song's other parameters. For example, long dissolves can complement arrangements that include smooth timbres and long-held tones. A video can use different visual material to offset an important hook or a different cutting rhythm at the beginnings and ends of phrases. And, of course, these effects can switch from one-to-one relationships to something that is more contrapuntal (p. 49).

These kinds of expressive possibilities are then illustrated through a great range of examples, all analysed with an interpretive richness that makes the inclusion of three extended case study chapters at the end of the book almost feel like too much of a good thing.

In her afterword, Vernallis claims that her book 'attempts to lay out the basic materials of music video, much as David Bordwell and his colleagues do for cinema in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* or *Film Art*' (p. 286). *Experiencing Music Video* will certainly prove useful as a textbook, and some of the unnecessary repetition between chapters may be explained by an expectation that the book will be consulted in separate chunks on individual weeks of a course rather than as a whole. However, I feel that Vernallis is selling herself short with her comparison. There is an imaginative and idiosyncratic, yet disciplined, interpretive impulse behind her analysis which *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*[3] explicitly rejects. Her book has more in common with the poetic categorizations of sound theorist Michel Chion or, casting the net more widely, the sensitive responses to the intricacies of a filmed fictional world demonstrated by George M. Wilson's *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View*.[4] Both Wilson and Vernallis seize on 'moments' which the authors then seek to explain in relation to their fictional world, whether that be a setting stimulated by dramatic possibilities, as in the case of narrative film, or musical parameters, as is the case with the music video. As Vernallis states, by attending to the smallest of moments, 'it will be possible to work toward seeing how the video builds toward this moment and moves away from it' (p. 202).

2 Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1992).

3 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985).

4 George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

On a number of occasions, even an attentive and immersed critic like Vernallis cannot resist the temptation to compare song–image relationships in the music video with the perceived 'typical' conventions of classical cinema and classical narrative film music. This necessitates a diversion from the book's primary, and most laudable, aim to fully understand the influence of the music of the music video.

In all three books, the acknowledgement of a body of film music writing that can be categorized as 'classical' provides evidence of a now mature field of study. This literature is not always integrated seamlessly with the authors' own arguments. All three works provide illuminating insights into types of screen music that are not accounted for adequately by classical theory. However, the arguments work best when engaging carefully with the specific relationships observable and audible in their chosen objects of study, rather than looking over the shoulder towards models of classical narrative film music, or assuming the value of an analysis simply because it does not fit the classical mould. In the kind of text-based criticism pursued by all three writers, the most generous kind of critical activity can also be the most myopic. Vernallis's book, in particular, shows the rewards of a close reading of particular moments, as it produces insights which may inspire the reader to understand, in new and surprising lights, not only that moment, but others they encounter themselves.

Mike Budd and Max H. Kirsch (eds), *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005, 341 pp.

EWAN KIRKLAND

Rethinking Disney is a collection of eleven diverse essays which belongs alongside other recent re-evaluations of the media corporation and its output. The detailed textual analyses of Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan's *Deconstructing Disney*,[1] Janet Wasko's multi-perspective *Understanding Disney*,[2] *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens* by Sean Griffin[3] (himself included in this volume) and *The Celebration Chronicles*,[4] Andrew Ross's sociological report on Disney's planned community, taken together represent a contemporary reappraisal of the scope, integration and complexity of Disney's multifarious activities. Consequently, this collection addresses Disney's involvement in film and television, but also theme parks, publishing, sport, new media, architectural design, real estate development and theatrical stage shows. Coeditor Mike Budd's introduction sets out the collection's remit to offer an investigation into conflicts over private/public demarcation of activities, spaces and spheres as exemplified by the Disney corporation. This includes the construction of private theme-park districts as public spaces; expansions of the fantasy space of animated features into public shopping malls and sports centres; the privatization and militarization of public areas; or the degree to which a private corporation acts like a public government agency, receiving public funding while evading public scrutiny. As Dick Hebdige highlights early in the collection, 'Disneyfication' encompasses an increasing range of social, cultural and economic trends: pervasive merchandizing and commercialization; the theming of cultural zones and districts; the Bowdlerization and sanitization of history; the homogenization and gentrification of urban

1 Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).
2 Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).
3 Sean Griffin, *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: Walt Disney from the Inside Out* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000).
4 Andrew Ross, *The Celebration Chronicles of Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Proper Happiness* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1999).

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districts. The authors in this collection reflect the term's diversification, while arguing, at the same time, that Disney's activities typify wider tendencies within North American society.

Given the importance of synergy to Disney's success – 1930s Mickey Mouse Clubs' promotion of 'educational' toys; 1950s and 1960s theme parks advertised through Disney television programmes; contemporary Disney Stores; product placement and burger bar tie-ins – in many studies the corporation's media output loses centrality within a matrix of cross-promotional texts, products and experiences. Here, Maurya Wickstrom identifies a process of mimetic exchange running throughout Disney's operations, whereby commodities and human bodies come to resemble one another. From animatronics to puppetry to cell animation, inanimate objects are brought to life, while living humans voluntarily embody Disney characters, be it cast members wearing oversized Goofy costumes, young girls in Disney Princess dresses, or mimes and dancers performing *The Lion King* stage show. In the latter example, Wickstrom argues, discourses of 'magic' surrounding the musical, journalistic narratives of quality artistry overcoming commercial corporatism, and theatrical designs evoking a 'primitive' fetishism, are a distraction from the overwhelming commodity fetishism of recontextualizing Disney branded characters, all for sale in nearby Disney Stores. Both notions coincide in the 'purchasable fetish' represented by Beanie Babies reproducing the design of masks and African body costumes, consequently imbued with a consumer-friendly aura of otherness. If the originating text, *The Lion King* film (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, 1994), receives little attention, such an analysis nevertheless resonates with the anthropomorphizing tradition within Disney's feature animations, nature documentaries and live action films.

Elsewhere, Disney's origins as a producer of narrative cinema are seen to permeate the corporation's non-media endeavours. In one of several articles exploring Disney's forays into real estate development, Stacy Warren argues that company employees apply the same scripted, storyboarded approach and philosophy to urban planning as to animated features and theme parks. In an essay resembling an ironic travel account of a transcontinental voyage across 'the most meticulously themed environments on the planet' (p. 60), Susan Willis illustrates how the various zones of Disney's Animal Kingdom park are constructed through fictional frameworks of narrative and genre. Conflicting stories of big game hunting and environmentalism merge in the 'spontaneous' chase of poachers which concludes Africa's safari adventure ride. Here passengers 'are center stage in a drama that coalesces contradictory strands of narrative into one fun-filled eco-friendly package' (p. 55). The incompatibility between a commercial themed zoo and the park's discourse of animal rights, environmentalism and ecology forms the subject of Scott Hermanson's later article. In Animal Kingdom's fabricated Asia, animals constitute national-geographic signifiers, cast-members directed by food and pheromones, all within a 'Third World

Never-Never Land' (p. 59) devoid of industrialization or globalization. The enclosures, where animals appear to be in natural surroundings, are landscaped to conceal the moats, walls and bollards which keep them in place. While constituting a meticulously controlled experience, Willis identifies ruptures in the park's storytelling hermeneutic: for example, in the narrative-free Tree of Life sculpture, a wooden structure carved with some 400 animals, and in DinoLand USA, which situates the surrounding wildlife in a wider historical context of extinction. For Hermanson the studio's historical association with fantasy lands populated by animated creatures conflicts with Animal Kingdom's dedication to constructing an authentic encounter with nature, while the experience itself draws heavily upon culturally constructed ideas of the natural derived from screen representations, amongst them Disney's 1950s and 1960s wildlife documentaries.

Situating Disney's film and television production alongside the company's non-media interests proves extremely revealing. Frank Roost discusses Disney's urban development and real estate ventures, identifying such activities' integration into Disney's media promotional strategy. The company's involvement in re-developing Time Square – home to a Disney Store, the theatre showing *The Lion King* and ABC's *Good Morning America* (1975–) studio – results in increasing use of New York City to publicize Disney's feature film premiers. Investment in *The Golden Girls* (1985–92), a sitcom about four women retiring to Florida, functions to raise Disney's state property value. The ABC studio's large window overlooking Time Square promotes both the tourist location and many Disney products the site advertises. Just as *Un indien dans la ville/An Indian in the City* (1994), Hervé Palud's film about a boy from a remote tropical village visiting his father in Paris served to sell Disneyland Paris, so the same formula was used in *Jungle 2 Jungle* (John Pasquin, 1997) to popularize Time Square as a tourist destination. The insect city in *A Bug's Life* (John Lasseter, 1998), dirty and populated with undesirable creatures, represents Time Square before its Disney-orchestrated makeover. Similarly *Hercules*' (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1997) depiction of Thebes ('The Big Olive') as a crime-ridden, pestilential city, saved by a heroic figure ironically associated with Disney branding, merchandizing and commercialization, justifies and celebrates Disney's efforts in 'cleaning up' New York City. Roost even identifies subliminal images in *Home Improvements* (1991–9) promoting the architectural design of homes in Celebration, the Disney-built town.

Despite the promise of its title, and while consistently emphasizing the interconnectedness of Disney products, *Rethinking Disney* nevertheless contains some familiar arguments. For example, Hebdige, in a generally provocative article, reiterates Henry Giroux's[5] claims concerning Disney's exploitative construction of 'innocence' and the dubious ideological ends it serves. Condemning the studio for fostering a cultural disposition which 'actively rewards states of arrested development, denial, disavowal, and unacknowledgement' (p. 43), Hebdige attacks the

5 Henry A. Giroux, 'Memory and pedagogy in the "Wonderful World of Disney": beyond the politics of innocence', in Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Hass and Laura Sells (eds), *From Mouse to Mermaid: the Politics of Film, Gender and Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

juvenilization and Disneyfication of the corporate workplace, contemporary modern art and Greek mythology. Reproducing similar criticisms, Lee Artz draws parallels between the studio's corporate practice and its animated features. Disney films, Artz argues, favour global capitalism, promote selfish individualism, discriminate against social democracy and justify the same hierarchical structures involved in their own creation. Some detailed film analysis supports these claims: the naturalization of hierarchies through animated character design, the construction of non-central characters as witless and submissive to authority, and recurring endings where elitist hierarchies are restored unchanged and unchallenged. The attention paid to recent Disney features is certainly useful, but in arguing the studio's ideological output remains unaltered since *Snow White* (1937), Artz ignores contemporary developments in Disney's film content, not inconceivably themselves provoked by such well-worn film and cultural criticism.

More original papers emphasize the limitations of Disney's cultural and economic power, the complexity of Disney films and the conflicting meanings surrounding Disney consumption. The focus of Stacy Warren's article is the frequent failure of the Disney Planning Storyboard, showing how environmental groups, residents' associations and anti-Disney campaigners successfully scuppered Disney's development plans on several occasions. Warren's account suggests both the corporation's mismanagement and self-defeating arrogance, alongside the effectiveness of public resistance to the Disney version. Radha Jhappan and Daiva Stasiulis's essay on Disney's *Pocahontas* (Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg, 1995) provides detailed analysis of both cinema feature and made-for-video follow-up (Tom Ellery and Bradley Raymond, 1998), a significant market rarely considered by Disney critics. In contrast to its default status within mainstream culture, Jhappan and Stasiulis argue that *Pocahontas* decentres and racializes whiteness, questions the historical dichotomy between European civilization and native savagery, and attempts – with some success – a sympathetic and respectful depiction of Native Americans. While concluding that the *Pocahontas* films ultimately present a Eurocentric revision of history, the authors nevertheless recognize the texts' evident diversions from classic Disney concerning representations of gender and ethnicity. Questioning orthodox understandings of Disney as unwavering promoter of traditional heterosexist patriarchy, Sean Griffin provides a compelling history of gay and lesbian events at Disney theme parks. From the unofficial invasion of territory of the late 1970s, through depoliticized 1980s fundraisers, to recent non-confrontational – and corporately lucrative – 'Gay Days', Griffin illustrates the ongoing discourse between Disney management and gay and lesbian communities concerning such occasions' definition, framing and construction. Articulating 'the balancing act between using and being used by corporate capitalism' (p. 147), Griffin argues that Disney 'Gay Days' and the meanings they bear remain extremely open.

As Warren writes: 'From virtually every theoretical position – whether neo-Marxist, postmodern, deconstructionist, postcolonial – it is almost taken for granted that anything the company does will result in a blandly homogenized sugary-sweet facade masking the ruthless and fundamentally undemocratic corporate activities and policies that are its underpinning, all willingly swallowed by a politically gullible public' (p. 231). With some exceptions, contributors to *Rethinking Disney* largely conform to this perspective, resulting in some revealing critical negotiations. Artz, for example, raises, only to dismiss, notions of the active Disney audience, emphasizing the apparent geographical uniformity in interpreting Disney features. Similarly, the possibility of polysemy or 'resistant readings' within Disney texts is rejected, allowing Artz to assert: 'there is no doubt about the intent, the themes, and the dominant meanings preferred' (p. 76). In a revealing study exploring Disney's *Winnie the Pooh* products, Aaron Taylor focuses on the character's dualistic identity resulting from the company's introduction of 'Classic' Pooh merchandise based on Shepard's original illustrations. Despite dismissing 'fidelity criticism' and acknowledging 'the various cultural, corporate, and artistic voices laying claim to Winnie-the-Pooh', Taylor nevertheless evokes a sense of 'cultural dilution' (p. 183) resulting from Disney's corporate integration of Milne and Shepard's characters and designs. Frequently the figure of the child consumer surfaces in such criticism, be it Dick Hebdige's discussion of a return to idealized origin implicated in the brand loyalty Disney inspires; or children's 'automatic desire to enact what they find compelling' (p. 102) in Wickstrom's mimetic exchange, or the little-brained bear of children's literature irretrievably corrupted by the Disney cultural machine. The implied child of these accounts functions to justify the critical tendencies Warren identifies, evoking an infantilized, passive, easily manipulated audience whose trusting innocence/ignorance of consumer capitalism is exploited by a cynical parental corporation. Despite the image of two young children on *Rethinking Disney*'s front cover, Disney's relationship with child consumers, Disney products as children's culture, or the 'childness'[6] of Disney's milieu remains largely unexplored, a recurring tendency within studies of Disney which this collection does little to rectify.

Rethinking Disney contains many well-researched analyses of the Disney Corporation's complex network of interconnected business interests. Interrogating the pervasive synergy which characterizes its operations, scholars of film and television will find this collection extremely useful in illuminating the machinations of a contemporary multi-media corporation expanded well beyond the straightforward provision of screen entertainment for paying audiences. Original in its multi-disciplinary approach, and pushing the envelope in terms of what is considered 'Disney studies', *Rethinking Disney* nevertheless remains largely traditional in perspective, while some – seemingly obvious – avenues of enquiry remain unexplored.

6 Peter Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Gloucestershire: Thimble Press, 1997).

Andrew Moor, *Powell and Pressburger: a Cinema of Magic Spaces*. London: IB Tauris, 2005, 250 pp.
Ian Christie and Andrew Moor (eds), *The Cinema of Michael Powell: International Perspectives on an English Film-Maker*. London: British Film Institute, 2005, 295 pp.
Sarah Street, *Black Narcissus*. London: IB Tauris (Turner Classic Movies British Film Guide Series), 2005, 102 pp.
Mark Connelly, *The Red Shoes*. London: IB Tauris (Turner Classic Movies British Film Guide Series), 2005, 96 pp.

JOHN MUNDY

The centenary of Michael Powell's birth in 1905 has been marked by a number of books relating to his work, his collaboration with the exiled Emeric Pressburger (born in Hungary in 1902) and individual films. Critically neglected following the sensationalism that surrounded *Peeping Tom* (1960), Powell's reputation was restored through some pioneering work by Ian Christie in the 1970s and 1980s and by expressions of indebtedness by filmmakers, including Martin Scorsese. The publication of Powell's two-volume autobiography *A Life In Movies* and *Million-Dollar Movie* provided rich, if erratic, material for the restoration of his critical standing.[1]

Andrew Moor is in little doubt about the continuing fascination and relevance of the films of Powell and Pressburger. For him, as he announces in his introduction to *Powell and Pressburger: a Cinema of Magic Spaces*, the questions their films pose are those we more commonly associate with postmodernism, postcolonial studies and with cultural geography. How, he asks, do cinematic 'representations of journeys, border crossings, and other geographical shifts relate to, or tell us anything about, more interior, psychological "journeys" and changes in identity?' (p. 1). Moor's sustained and coherent investigation of the

1 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies: an Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1986), and *Million-Dollar Movie* (London: Heinemann, 1992).

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films, starting with *The Spy In Black* (1939) and ending with *The Tales Of Hoffmann* (1951), meaningfully explores the central importance of the construction of 'magic spaces' within an aesthetic which is often seen to sit uncomfortably within prevailing notions of British cinematic realism. Though insisting on the stylistic variety of their films, Moor argues that what characterizes the partnership's output was not just their concern to experiment, but to produce films that were thematically complex. As Ian Christie, John Ellis and others before him have insisted, the result has been to place their films in an uneasy, oblique relationship with what is often regarded as British national cinema. Yet, for Moor, much of the interest and significance of Powell and Pressburger lies precisely in their ability to 'perturb the apparent tidiness' (p. 12) of British national cinema through what he concludes is their 'particular line of romantic international nationalism' (p. 228), especially evident in the films of the 1940s.

The strength of Moor's book is in his analysis of individual films. Noting both the importance of Powell's early exposure to European filmmaking and the uneasy exiled situation in which Pressburger found himself, he is nonetheless at pains to recuperate their films within a broader concept of British cinema that extends beyond an aesthetic devoted to 'quality realism'. Though never reluctant to incorporate the wider resonances that actors such as Conrad Veidt and Anton Walbrook brought to their films, not least in delineating the complexity of identities, the influence of Shakespeare and Kipling and 'Englishness' is, for Moor, especially important to an understanding of films such as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and *A Canterbury Tale* (1944). The critical commentaries on these two films, and on *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) and *Black Narcissus* (1947), are exceptionally sensitive and illuminating, a riposte to those contemporary critics who found the films 'baffling', and a lifeline to students encountering them for the first time today. Moor's ability to relate these films to cultural dynamics, not least emergent postwar masculinities and femininities, and to the quest for idealism which he sees as central to Powell and Pressburger's films, is powerfully cogent.

He seems less sure when dealing with *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *The Tales of Hoffmann*, two so-called 'art films' where Powell and Pressburger 'flaunt their own romantic credentials' (p. 198). Though he is surely right in arguing that these two films 'occupy ambivalent cultural positions' (p. 199) in the sense that they valorize a high-Romantic concern with 'Art' without becoming art-house films, his reading of the two films comes close to suggesting a sense of exhaustion and retreat, not least in *Hoffmann's* 'eradication of external reality'. An examination of *Oh . . . Rosalinda!!* (1955), the last film in a loose trilogy, might have revealed more about Powell and Pressburger's views on the complex relationship between art, cinema, politics and the state during the Cold War era. These are interesting films, made in interesting and changing times, that found an audience and critical acclaim not least in the USA,

much to the annoyance of Stanley Donen who, in 1948, was codirecting *On The Town* with Gene Kelly and found that, unusually, American product was overshadowed by all the talk about *The Red Shoes*, 'this picture from England'.[2]

Though he sketches in some of the background production of the films, including the relationship between the Archers and Rank, as well as the political and economic landscape in which British cinema operated, Moor's interest is in hermeneutics rather than political economy. As such, this commentary will be essential reading for anyone engaging with the work of Powell and Pressburger. The one disappointment is that, for a book that concentrates on a partnership beginning in 1939 and ending in 1956 (at the expense of films made before and after those dates), there is little evaluation of the *distinctive* contributions made by either man. Though noting, for example, that *The Red Shoes* 'differs tellingly' from Pressburger's original, 1937 script, or citing John Ellis's comment on Pressburger's 'uneasy status' in Britain, Moor shies away from developing any views about ways in which their collaboration worked and the effect on the films of what Ian Christie in 1978 described as 'the distinct and even contradictory elements within the production ensemble'.[3]

Christie has returned to this issue in one of his essays in *The Cinema of Michael Powell: International Perspectives on an English Film-Maker*, edited by Christie and Andrew Moor. Arguing that, at its best, the partnership created 'miraculously fused works' (p. 172), Christie notes the 'schematic' approach that characterizes Pressburger's outline conceptions for *A Canterbury Tale* and *Colonel Blimp*, and the undoubted influence of German Weimar cinema on Pressburger's scripts. Christie's conclusion about the collaboration between 'Pressburger the writer and Powell the practical film director' (p. 184) is that both partners realized that they achieved more through their 'intimate' cooperation than they could working alone.

Though this is a book dedicated to Powell as an English filmmaker, a product of English Edwardian culture, influenced by writers such as Kipling and Chesterton, with the exception of Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytic reading of *Peeping Tom* (1960) the essays concentrate on those films he produced in collaboration with Pressburger and tend to valorize the wider cosmopolitan influences evident within the films. As John Ellis puts it, 'Powell was a European film-maker whose misfortune it was to be British' (p. 11). The creative alliance with Pressburger perfectly suited Powell's own uneasy relationship with an often brutish British sensibility and enabled Powell to develop an aesthetic that appeared out of kilter with British cinema culture. In his illuminating analysis of the first four minutes of *The Spy In Black*, Charles Barr asserts that the partnership gelled instantly, despite the delay in the screen credits that announced joint responsibility for writing, producing and directing until 1942. In fact, as the essays here tend to suggest, this shared

2 Donen's comments recalled an internal MGM studio memorandum from Arthur Freed that made a comparison between *On The Town* and Powell and Pressburger's film. See Stephen M. Silverman, *Dancing on the Ceiling: Stanley Donen and his Movies* (New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf, 1996), p. 120.

3 Ian Christie (ed.), *Powell Pressburger and Others* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 1.

credit is more a tribute to the satisfaction both partners felt with their alliance, rather than an accurate reflection of distinctive creative inputs.

The international perspective on Powell (and, inevitably, it seems, Pressburger) comes from American and European scholars in a series of distinctive and enlightening essays. Lesley Stern ruminates on the cinematic manipulation of time in *A Matter of Life and Death*, and Tom Gunning cleverly and effectively dices with *I Know Where I'm Going* (1945), a film that provokes lasting emotional investment from viewers, as a love story. Jean-Louis Leutrat notes the sense of smell as one of cinema's 'limit points' and analyzes the intruding presence of perfume in *Black Narcissus*, while Natacha Thiery offers real insight into the centrality of women characters in The Archers' films and their dramatization of women as 'subjects of desire' (p. 225). The essays from British scholars are no less intriguing, including Andrew Moor's suggestive possibilities of potential queer readings of Powell and Pressburger's films. Robert Shail examines typologies of masculinity, and Nanette Aldred offers a particularly useful review of Hein Heckroth's contribution as production designer, not least on *The Red Shoes* and *The Tales of Hoffmann.* Philip Horne examines *A Matter of Life and Death* and engagingly unearths even more evidence of what he refers to as the Hungarian connection. Christie reflects in detail on the extent to which *A Canterbury Tale* drew upon contemporary sources, propaganda influences and ideological preoccupations, and asks how this inflects our own understanding of the film. Though Graeme Harper's challenging and perceptive essay examines Powell's solo effort *Age of Consent* (1969), his main emphasis is on *They're A Weird Mob* (1966), the other 'Australian' film that was scripted by Pressburger under the pseudonym of Richard Imrie. In the process, he opens up some fresh perspectives on the European-ness of Powell and Pressburger's films.

There are some disappointing omissions in the book. There is nothing on Powell's earlier films produced before his collaboration with Pressburger, nor, despite the contributions of composers Allan Gray and Brian Easdale, is there anything on music within their films. However, at a time when publishers seem less inclined to publish them, *The Cinema of Michael Powell* is an important reminder of just how important edited collections can be.

It is a measure of the recurrent interest in the films of Powell and Pressburger that two of the recent British Film Guide series published by IB Tauris are devoted to *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948). Sarah Street's excellent monograph on the earlier film offers not just impeccable analysis, but a concern to place *Black Narcissus* as an open text that continues to have contemporary relevance, not least through the film's focus on femininity and sexual desire, its complicated take on colonialism, as well as its articulation of recurrent cinematic tropes that signify a profound sense of displacement and instability. It is a film, Street argues, whose 'cultural importance . . . exceeds its stature in the canon of Powell and Pressburger films' (p. 60). Without explicitly

downgrading Powell's claims as an innovative director, Street's analysis of the film accentuates the significant contributions made by production designer Alfred Junge, costume designer Hein Heckroth and, perhaps above all, cinematographer Jack Cardiff. She is also at pains to acknowledge the extent to which Powell and Pressburger's screenplay 'kept fairly close to [Rumer Godden's 1939] novel in terms of structure and intent' (p. 12), but is sensitive to some important changes, not least in Powell's visualization of the East, a visualization that Godden considered inauthentic. Street's impeccable research, uncovering for example the ways in which the Catholic League of Decency damaged the film's reception in the USA, remains subservient to the clarity of her analysis. Noting the resurgence of interest in Powell and Pressburger in the 1970s and 1980s, not least from Martin Scorsese, Street devotes some space to ways in which lesbian and feminist directors in the late 1980s and 1990s have appropriated *Black Narcissus* within avant-garde films. In the context of the book as a whole, this seems rather like special pleading, since the film's continuing fascination extends far beyond its sexual politics. This is minor criticism of an illuminating, authoritative, exceptionally well-written and compelling analysis of what many regard as one of the most significant films to challenge accepted notions of British cinema based on the realist canon.

In his monograph on *The Red Shoes*, Mark Connelly also stresses the 'unBritish' quality that is said to characterize the films of Powell and Pressburger. Connelly offers a useful, if slightly ill-disciplined, account of the context in which the film was produced. What he says is very useful, though in the context of this short book, his ebullient praise for the work of cinematographer Jack Cardiff seems over-lengthy. He makes a number of interesting points about the film itself, arguing convincingly for the vampyric quality embedded in Anton Walbrook's performance as the Svengali-like Lermontov, and offers a tellingly effective account of the relationship not just between the Red Shoes ballet sequence and the wider narrative, but between the film's complex modal interweaving between realism, surrealism and fantasy.